

ARCHITECTURE BATTAMBANG

Walking Map South



History

Battambang City, with around 140,000 inhabitants, is the largest secondary city in Cambodia. Its name comes from the legend of Bat Dambong, the “Disappearing Stick”. Situated on the Sangker River, people have lived in wooden houses along its banks for centuries. When the province was associated with the Siamese (1795 to 1907), Battambang City had about 2,500 residents. By the end of the 19th century the number increased to around 100,000. An open-air market (today known as Psar Nath), numerous pagodas, a Chinese temple and rectangular fort with the palace of the Lord Governor dating to 1830 were landmarks of the city.

During the French protectorate the formerly dispersed settlement was transformed into a busy marketplace, urban agglomeration and administrative stronghold. The French introduced two urban development plans, including a grid pattern of streets, the construction of bridges and a railway linking Battambang to Phnom Penh.

After Cambodia’s independence Battambang City quintupled its area and became the industrial and commercial centre of the region. Several large infrastructure and public facilities were built under the state modernization program; including schools, university, sports centre, museum and exhibition hall, roads, airport and the extension of the railway line to Poipet.

Further Information

The Battambang Municipality, supported by the German Development Service, DED, has launched the initiative “Our City – Our Heritage” with the aim of preserving valuable heritage buildings with their original appearance to sustain the cultural identity and unique historic character of the city; the inner city area shown on this map is classified as a “Heritage Protection Area”. Khmer Architecture Tours promotes urban heritage in Cambodia, especially in Phnom Penh, and conducts tours on architecture and public-awareness projects.

www.kambodscha.ded.de / www.gdc-cambodia.org
www.battambang-heritage.org / www.ka-tours.org

Urban Heritage

Battambang City has inherited a rich urban heritage with a great variety of historic architecture, the styles and layouts representing different phases of the city’s history. The city center between Road #1 and Road #3 is characterized by a coherent ensemble of about 800 heritage buildings from the French protectorate and the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (period after the country’s independence).

Outside of this area, outstanding heritage buildings, like the New Khmer Architecture of the Battambang University, French-Classical style villas along the river and traditional Khmer wooden houses can be found. Throughout the city beautiful Wats are expression of the city’s religious heritage. All these historic buildings and ensembles contribute to the city’s unique character and beauty.



Provincial Museum



Stupa Wat Kamphaeng

Photos: Alexander C. Bunzel

The buildings included on the map

The maps are about understanding and appreciating the city as a whole and include buildings from various periods. We have not tried to be historically comprehensive but aim to offer interesting walks, which capture the special qualities of ordinary buildings and streets as well as some important landmarks.

KHMER ARCHITECTURE TOURS

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Most of the area of this Walking Map was the location of a fort called “Kampaeng”. Constructed under Thai rule in 1837 it was 480 by 720 meters large. The “Lord Governor” lived inside with his wives, female dancers, 56 elephants and horses; no other men were allowed inside the inner fort. It has been demolished in 1910 with the realization of the first French city development plan. Under the French protectorate until today the area is used mainly for administration purposes: e.g. provincial hall, provincial court...

1. Exhibition Hall

This building has been designed for traveling exhibitions during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, its present use is for exhibitions. It was inaugurated in 1961 and is one of the few exhibition halls throughout resisting time and destruction. The building’s architect is Yieng (full name is unknown), who worked within the Department of Public Works in Battambang and died during the Khmer Rouge. This centre and the Provincial Museum next to it are part of the urban development along the riverside in central Battambang.

The building’s shape is irregular and the whole structure made of wood. It contains elements of traditional Cambodian architecture, like an introverted space with a cooling lotus pond, a well-ventilated cloister and a gallery. Furthermore typical elements of the 60s are featured in the outside with rough stonewalls, reinforced concrete for the portico.

2. Provincial Museum

This building is another design of the architect Yieng and was inaugurated in 1968. The building is built in a T-shape. Similar to the Exhibition Hall it combines traditional elements of Cambodian architecture like the gabled roof with Khmer motifs in the pediments with modern elements like concrete structure. Many artifacts had disappeared during the war.

3. Boxing Stadium (Sports Ground)

Erected during the 1960s, the compound consists of service building, an open-air bar and a (recently dismantled) wooden gallery for audiences. Olympic Rings can be found everywhere as decorative elements. The stadium was popular for Khmer boxing until 2007.

4. Post Office

Built by the French administration between 1907 and 1926, the Post Office has been renovated first during the Lon Nol regime and again in 2007. Some main architectural elements, like roof and windows, have been modified. The building has been used as a post office and telecommunication since the beginning.

5. Electricity Company and Department of Water Authority

The Electricite du Cambodge and the Water Authority have been established under the French administration, which started to develop the city from 1907 onwards. The development of technical infrastructure like water and energy supply was essential to meet the demands of the growing city. The location works as a buffer between the administration complex and the residential and commercial city centre to the north. The compound of the Electricity Authority houses a warehouse erected prior to 1925. It facilitated a Soviet-made Diesel generator that fueled the city’s

need for energy until 2008 when Thailand started to supply power to Cambodia.

A water tower from 1920s is still intact. In the past the supply covered only the city center, but in order to meet present demands, the capacity of the station has been enlarged in 2005 under the financial support from China. The station’s water comes from the Sangker River.

6. House for the Vice Governor of Battambang

The villa was erected for the family of the first Vice Governor of Battambang. It has a distinctive architectural style, merging French-colonial style and traditional Khmer elements. Particularly the concrete sculptures supporting the roof are very uncommon for residential buildings. Those “Kenor” is a mythical female dancer with a body half human and half bird, normally only used for Wats and public buildings as decoration. The building is still public property and today illegally occupied by multiple families, which have filled the compound with their shelters.

7. Provincial Court

Built during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum by the same local architect Mr. Yieng who built the Provincial Museum of Battambang, the building features a representative style merging modern and classical Khmer architecture elements. The French Court used to stand on the opposite corner of the street, in the same block as the prison.

8. Former Prison Location

The French built a prison in between 1907 and 1926, using parts of the north wall of the old Kampaeng Fort. It was continuously used as a prison for ordinary criminals until the Khmer Rouge time. The buildings were demolished in 2007, using the compound for the construction of a new commercial area, which can be seen today.

9. Wat Kamphaeng and Stupa of 1840

The original Wat was built before 1837 by Mrs. Tim, first wife of Governor Kathathan Nhonh and mother of the last “Lord Governor” Chhum. Its original location was the present-day South Primary School, but in order to extend the street #3 to the south, the Wat was relocated around 1926 to the present position, replacing eight elephant shelters for 56 elephants of the Lord Governor.

The stupa on the school compound is the last remainder of the old Wat. It is said that the stupa, built in 1840, contains the ashes of one of Buddha’s disciples named Preah Arahanta Theat.

10. Kamphaeng High School

Both school buildings are in their original shape, an architecture influenced by the French-colonial style. The school is one out of four similar primary schools erected by the French administration throughout the city.

11. Sport Centre (Au Cercle Sportif de Battambang)

The Sports Centre consists of the Sports’ Club and the attached swimming pool. Originally named “Preah Sihanouk Swimming-Pool” the Sports Centre was designed by local architect Lu Pen Hap and replaced the French Officers’ Casino. King Norodom Sihanouk himself inaugurated the centre on 27th May 1965. The swimming-pool was only the third of its kind that was built in Cambodia. Reduced in its length in recent years it used to have dimensions that meet Olympic specifications. Notice the original diving board being located far from the pool today! The open terrace above the gallery has been filled with a massage club recently.

12. Sala Khaet

Under Thai influence from 1795 to 1907, the family of Chavfea Baen ruled over the province for six generations. In 1905, the last “Lord Governor” of Battambang hired Italian architects from Bangkok to construct a new residence inside his fort (“Kamphaeng”). Leaving in 1907, when France insisted the province to be returned to Cambodia, all his houses were sold to the French authority, including the residence, which he never had lived in. Back in Thailand he lived in the town of Prachin Buri, where he built another (identical!) mansion and hired even the same craftsman.

Sala Khaet accommodated later on the “Resident Supérieur Française”, but the fort was destroyed in 1911 with a small part of the north wall remaining. A nearby Wat and school still carry the name “Kamphaeng”. The mansion underwent several restorations and lost some of its main original architectural features like the roof pediment, windows and doors. In 1990s the main gate was destroyed and replaced by a new gate in the style of Banteay Srey, initiated by the former Governor of Battambang who used to be a Governor of Siem Reap Province.

13. Royal Residence (Royal Bungalow)

The Royal Bungalow on the compound of the Provincial Residence was built in the 1960s by famous Cambodian architect Vann Molyvann. Its architectural design is a fusion of traditional Khmer architecture and contemporary features (“New Khmer Architecture”). It accommodates the Royal Family whenever they visit Battambang. His Majesty, King of Cambodia Norodom Sihamoni, was last seen there in 2007.

14. Department of Tourism

The Tourism Department is located in a colonial-style villa built prior 1926. Concerning the building’s history it might have been the office of the “Inspecteur de la Garde Indochine” according to a map from 1926. As part of the climate adaption an interior gallery surrounds the office rooms and cools against tropical heat. The main road crossing the administrative quarter parallel to the river was named Avenue Sisowath during the French occupation.

First Concrete Bridge

Built in 1916 by the French administration; the bridge emphasizes the main axis from the east of Battambang to the Provincial Hall. We can see the French road kilometer stone (with the inscription “0 kilometre a Battambang”) and the traditional pair of lions on the west bank of the river. The bridge was damaged by crossing military trucks in 1997 and is only accessible for motorbikes and pedestrians since that time.

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