

EXCLUSIVE Inside the Cambodian hotel with rooms fit for top-tier royalty - and it's just minutes away from 'eighth wonder of the world' Angkor Wat

- MailOnline's Fiona Hardcastle checked in to the five-star Anantara Angkor Resort
- It features a 'perfect courtyard pool' and beautiful Cambodian interiors
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By [FIONA HARDCASTLE FOR MAILONLINE](#)

PUBLISHED: 09:23, 22 February 2024 | **UPDATED:** 10:25, 22 February 2024

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'Three down!' trilled my husband, as the children fried in the unforgiving Cambodian sun. 'Only 997 to go!'

Heaven on earth it may be - Angkor is the biggest religious site in the world with over one thousand temples in an area roughly the size of Orkney - but you'll need stamina, sleeves and a clear sense of what to leave out before you start.

Temple addicts could easily spend a week visiting every shrine in the region and would be richly rewarded with a scale of spiritual devotion seen nowhere else on earth.

But there's no shame in squeezing the big four - the almighty Angkor Wat, the walled city of Angkor Thom, the so-called 'Tomb Raider' temple Ta Prohm, and the enormous enigmatic faces of Bayon - into a single day. Starting early is key.

Once Felix, 11, had got over the shock of the 3am alarm call and Rose, 17, and Evie, 16, had got over the shock of the dress code - shoulders, upper arms and thighs to be covered - we were off. Pilgrims progress, albeit in an air-conditioned limousine with ice-cold bottled water and a steady supply of lavender-scented face towels.

Don't mind if I do.

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Fiona Hardcastle and her family checked in to the five-star Anantara Angkor Resort



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Fiona found herself photographing every artefact in her sumptuous family pool suite (above)



© Sven Ellsworth

The 'perfect courtyard pool' was a tonic to the 3am starts and long days spent exploring the nearby temples of Angkor

for a stay in this gem of a hotel just minutes from some of the world's best museums (and it can get you into sold-out exhibitions)



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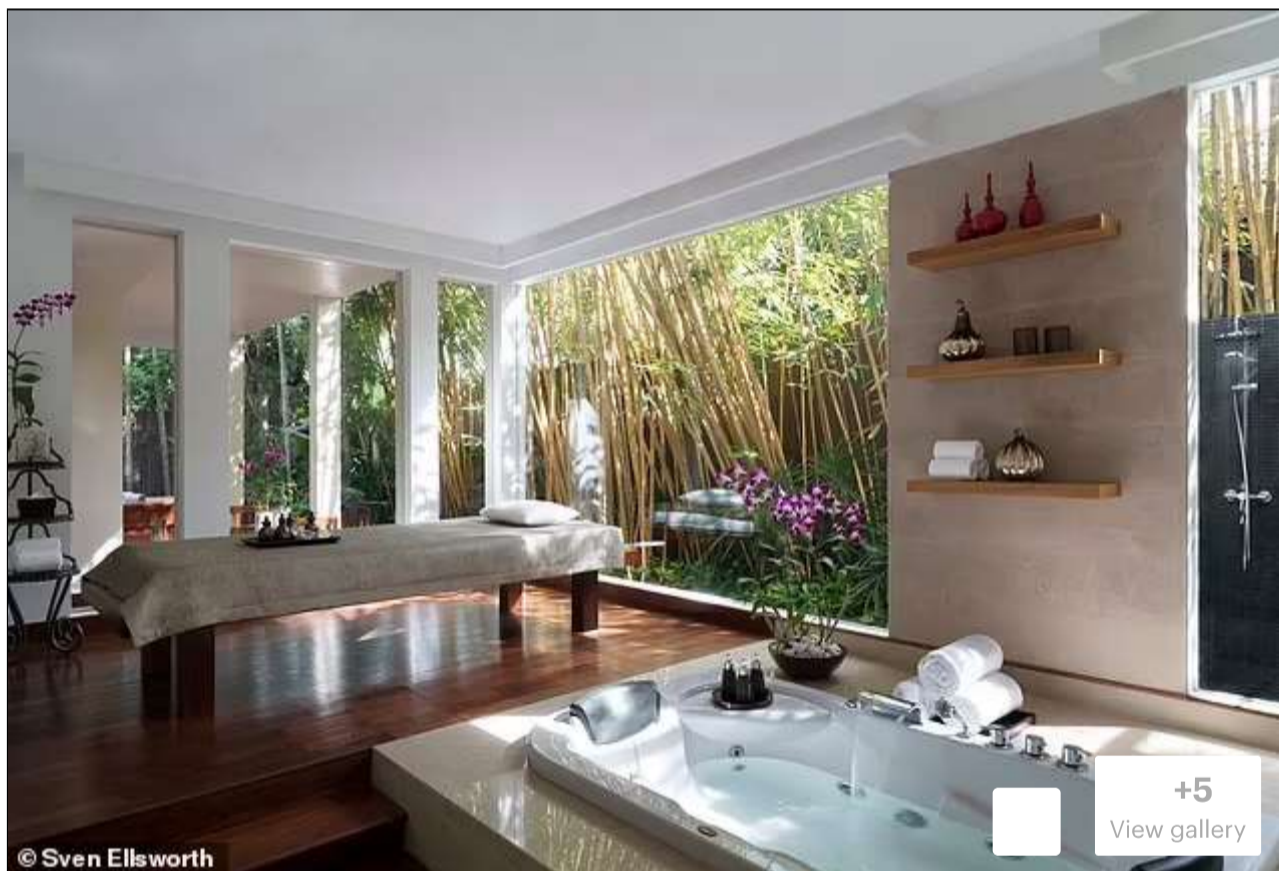
Here, being closer to the divine is the name of the game - something at which the **Anantara Angkor**, our luxury boutique base for our three-day tour, excels.

As if the deep reverberations of a gong marking our arrival had not been regal enough, no sooner had we stepped out of our car than we were garlanded with silk stoles, ushered to the spa for a ceremonial foot bath and shown to a set of rooms fit for top-tier working royalty.

The interiors showcased traditional Cambodian design so tastefully I found myself photographing every artefact in our sumptuous family pool suite.

The hotel is a faithful five-star keeper of the architecture flame lit by neighbouring Angkor Wat.

On size, symmetry and intricacy of detail, Cambodia's iconic 12th-century temple has been compared to The Great Wall of China, the Pyramids and the Taj Mahal all rolled into one. Yet it's strange how this masterpiece of the human mind, body and spirit is often overlooked on the bucket list of life.



'No sooner had we stepped out of our car than we were garlanded with silk stoles, and ushered to the spa for a ceremonial foot bath,' says Fiona of her arrival at the five-star resort



The 'shock of the 3am alarm call' is worth it for sunrise views like the above over Angkor Wat

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Breathtaking: The so-called 'Tomb Raider' temple, Ta Prohm, is one of the region's must-visits

Stranger still given the ease of combining a few nights in the region with a wider tour of South East Asia. Our three-night diversion was part of a longer trip to Vietnam and flights to Siem Reap, the closest airport to the sacred site and a buzzy, chic town in its own right, were like buses.

Certainly, we all agreed from the cool of the perfect courtyard pool, few experiences had been as spine-tingling as crossing the causeway at sunrise, catching our first glimpse of what is often seen as the eighth wonder of the world.

And after eight hours of enlightenment in 35-degree heat, the cool and calming sanctuary of Anantara Angkor left us all feeling we'd stumbled on the ninth.

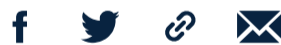
TRAVEL FACTS

Fiona was hosted by Anantara Angkor Resort, where rooms start from around £185 (\$235) a night, correct at the time of writing. Visit www.anantara.com.

PROS: Seamless service. Superb food. The spirituality of Angkor Wat in a boutique five-star setting.

CONS: The Angkor Eye Ferris wheel is next door.

Rating out of 5: *****



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