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# Bucket List Travel Is Back - A New Luxury Way To Visit Angkor Wat

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The Angkor area of Cambodia is full of temples famous and hidden. The 10th century Banteay Srei ... [\[+\]](#) GETTY

“Wonders of the World” and “Bucket List” are terms that get thrown around a lot in the travel industry, often inappropriately. But there is no doubt that Angkor Wat, the top tourism destination

in Cambodia, easily qualifies for both. In terms of ruins and manmade sites, there are few in the world that can compare. I've been to most of the big pyramid complexes in Mexico, to Machu Picchu, to the Coliseum, and other special sites, and I'd put Angkor Wat ahead of anything I've seen in this vein. It's also much bigger, so more worth a special trip.

For the past two years I've long been predicting a surge in Bucket List travel, because the pandemic helped people realize that life is short and unpredictable, and the things you put off may never come around - plus, who knows what the next shoe to drop might be? Travel is getting easier again as things reopen from pandemic closures, so if Angkor Wat is one of those places you planned to see "someday" - and it should be - you might just want to make someday now.



The main event at the Angkor Archaeological Park is the Angkor Wat temple complex, reflected in the ... [+] GETTY

It also just got cheaper and easier. Cambodia only reopened for tourism in November, and last month *Bloomberg* reported that 83% of the Cambodian population is fully vaccinated, among the

world's ten best countries, and noted that "There's Never Been a Better Time to Visit Angkor Wat...In Siem Reap, Cambodia, travel has just begun to reopen, creating glimmers of hope for locals and an opportunity of a lifetime for visitors." Opportunity of a lifetime!

Why go? For starters, the scale of Angkor Wat is amazing, much bigger than most people who have read about it or seen pictures expect. The name literally translates to City of Temples, and it is not one building, or even one group of buildings, but rather multiple sites containing roughly 1000 pieces of architecture spread over 154 square miles - that's seven times the size of Manhattan! It was built over a 500-year period from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the Angkor Archaeological Park has a lot to see, of which the namesake Angkor Wat temple is just one piece - but a vitally important one. This is the one reflected in the lake in front of it that shows up in postcards. Angkor Thom is technically a different city of ruins nearby, but also a must see. So is Ta Prohm, the overgrown temple in the jungle famously used to film the original Tomb Raider movie. There are many other important temple sites including Ta Som, Ta Nei, Preah Khan, Preah Ko, Pre Rup, East Mebon, and Banteay Srei, among others, some of them hidden gems and local secrets, rarely visited by Western tourists and great empty alternatives to the often-overcrowded main events. You get the idea - I was there for a couple of days, and while I hit the highlights, I left a lot unseen, and plan to return, You could easily spend a week in the area.

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Ta Prohm, the jungle temple, was made famous as a film setting in the Angelina Jolie hit Tomb ... [+] GETTY

The region is widely misunderstood by tourists who expect it to be a one hit wonder hit like Machu Picchu or Giza, going for a day, take some selfies. The gateway to Angkor Wat is the modern city of Siem Reap, also fascinating and much bigger than you might expect with tons of hotels, shopping, dining, other worthwhile touristic sights such as floating villages, a silk farm, cultural centers and even a pretty good golf course. Between the two, you are talking about a region, not an “attraction” or monument, and it can be part of a larger trip to Cambodia and/or Thailand or a great vacation destination in its own right. Even though there are luxury hotels here, Cambodia is an inexpensive place, and park admission, guides and food are all great values.

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A basic guest room at the luxurious Anantara Angkor Wat resort. 2019 SVEN ELLSWORTH

So what's new? When I visited, I stayed at the [Anantara Angkor Wat](#) and I loved it. I chose it because [Anantara](#) is one of those hidden gem foreign luxury brands off the radar of many American tourists, but not for long. Owned by an ex-pat American pizza mogul, the Thai based luxury chain has been growing by leaps and bounds and just expanded into Europe with a luxury golf resort in Portugal and top tier city hotels in Rome, Dublin and Budapest. They also own [NH Hotels](#), including the new NH New York, and some of the more famous Anantara properties are the Royal Livingstone at Victoria Falls, The Palm in Dubai, and Natadhu

Private Island in the Maldives, while the flagship Siam Hotel is easily Bangkok's best luxury palace. Anantara was an early player in the growing culinary tourism niche, and the first luxury chain to roll out a branded company-wide cooking school program, Spice Spoons, which at each locale features classes based on local food. I've stayed at Anantara resorts from Bali to Africa to Southeast Asia, and have never been disappointed, so I chose them for Angkor Wat and it was great. Now it's better.



Off the tourist path but conveniently located, the Anantara Angkor Wat is an escapist oasis of ... [+] BDV PHOTOGRAPHY

While most top hotels here are in the crowded Siem Reap urban stirp, this resort sits outside in a peaceful and secluded tropical setting, yet it's only minutes from the archeological park. It has great food, its own activities, and when you come back from a long day of exploration - which often begins before sunrise - it is a haven of escapist relaxation, with spacious and spread-out accommodations, open air dining and drinking venues, large high-end spa and gorgeous pool complex. It has the Spice Spoons

cooking classes focused on Khmer Cambodian cuisine, and four dining options.



The main restaurant at the Anantara resort, with courtyard dining as well. RÉGIS BINARD

Now that Cambodia is coming back online, the Anantara is wooing visitors back with its first all-inclusive package, one that is both user-friendly and an amazing value. The [Angkor All-Inclusive Discovery Package](#) includes accommodations, breakfast daily, choice of chef's special tasting menu for lunch or dinner daily, one high tea or Dining by Design (private custom meal) at Jungle Temple (lunch or dinner set up at a 900 year old temple in the jungle that is off the tourist trail and very private, a memorable and unique experience) per stay, a guided sunset quad biking (ATV) adventure one day, a guided countryside bike tour one day and most importantly, daily excursions to the Angkor Archaeological Park by private car with an English-speaking guide, including temple passes. All of these are for two people, and the nice thing about the package is that it is customizable, available in any length from three nights or more. The package starts at \$565 per night, which is a great deal with meals, rooms and full day guided

tours of the ruins, plus the other features – all for less than many luxury resorts now charge for a room with nothing at all.

Safe travels!

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