

# The Shoin Cambodia Times

Spring 2015



*Chigusa Suzuki at Bantey Srei*

## Crossing borders

*For Kobe Shoin Student Ambassador Chigusa Suzuki, a visit to Cambodia was a life-changing experience*

As student ambassador, I went to Cambodia in September and experienced many things I will treasure all my life.

Cambodia has no winter season, therefore I felt very hot. It was hard to walk anywhere by myself. The average temperature is 27 degrees.

I visited two major cities: Siem Reap and the capital city, Phnom Penh. In Siem Reap, I was impressed by the world heritage site Angkor Wat, a most magnificent Buddhist temple, and Bantey Srei, a mixed Hindu and Buddhist site. Everywhere were many beautiful sculptures and carvings.

I ate many kinds of food, rode an elephant, watched Cambodian traditional dance and tried on traditional clothes. I enjoyed everything.

But the three most impressive events for me were visiting homes of scholarship students, going to the university speech contest and meeting my loving host family.

At the homes of scholarship students Sim Srey Roth and Ky Chakareth we talked about education in

Cambodia and I learned that only 2% of women can go to university. This means that 98 % of women *cannot* go to university. Most women have to work as farmers as it costs a lot of money to go to university. Some scholarship students live in a small house without electricity or clean water. However they seemed to be having such fun when they were talking about family or school. I will never forget their smiling faces.

The Kobe Shoin Cambodia Speech Contest at the Royal University of Phnom Penh was wonderful! The contestants spoke English very well and the speeches were passionate and great.

I felt all the speakers appreciate their chance for a university education and so they study hard to achieve their dreams. I was very moved by their determination. That is just how students should be. I thought I should appreciate my own opportunities more and I took a closer look at myself.



*Scholarship student's home in Siem Reap*

With my loving host family we visited many places, such as a pagoda (a Buddhist temple), the Independence Monument, Central Market, Diamond Island (a Cambodian amusement park), and the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh.

I learned traditions, such as how to pray at a Cambodian temple and how to cook Cambodian food. They taught me many things and gave me many priceless experiences. I am grateful to my host family and all the great Cambodian people I met.

We cannot decide if a country is great only by judging its economic richness or cultural background.

I hope that the love of people will cross borders like one big flowing river to change the world to a better place ●

## Japan journal

*Ratananita Sol, winner of the 5<sup>th</sup> Kobe Shoin Cambodia Speech Contest, remembers her visit*

Stepping into the land of modernization on the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> December last year I knew that my dream had become reality.

During my two-week stay in Kobe, I was impressed by the kindness, friendliness, gentleness, and absolute politeness of Japanese people.

My four host families each left me with so many memories. Through their care and love I adapted easily and felt as if I were at home.

Thanks to these families, I had a chance to visit historical sites and other amazing places in Kobe, Kyoto, and Osaka. My first host sister took me to Kiyomizu-dera and shrines in Kyoto and we also went shopping for my favorite Japanese food.

With my second host family, I visited Suma Marine Aquarium and Akashi Kaikyō Bridge.

I spent my weekend with the other host families in Osaka; we rode a Ferris Wheel, tasted Japanese food, and went sightseeing. I was dressed in kimono and taught to cook

Osaka's traditional food, *okonomiyaki* and croquette.

Public transportation in Japan is admirable. I was so surprised with the incredible punctuality and convenience of the buses and trains. I was astonished that people prefer public transportation to private vehicles, which is totally different from my country. But with this modern transportation system, I enjoyed travelling around without any fatigue.

At the University, I noticed the well-organized facilities and the clean surrounding and classrooms. The campus is so lively, filled with trees

and flowers, and the view from the hill is breathtaking. What I love most are the library and the Chapel. The library building is so beautiful, light and airy while the chapel is a quiet and holy place. I remember the candle service and Christmas celebration. I usually went to chapel to pray, relax and listen to soft and beautiful organ melody.

I gained experience and knowledge about the culture of Japan from professors and students by attending many classes. I learned about Japanese way of life, famous food and places, traditional wedding ceremonies, festivals and other customs.

As an English teacher, I was very keen to observe the teaching techniques used in English classes as they will be very useful in my teaching career.

What is more, I participated in a calligraphy class, my first time to hold a big brush and write my name in Japanese Kanji.

My favorite lecture, however, was the *ikebana* class. By attending this lesson, I realized how talented and creative Japanese women are.

This trip gave me so many experiences and precious memories. I am sincerely grateful to Kobe Shoin Women's University for giving such opportunities to many female Cambodian students like me.

I also wish to thank Professor and Mrs. Mallett for organizing the trip, all my host sisters and their families for their love and generosity, Professor Shiobara for preparing welcome and farewell parties, and other professors and friends on Campus for their support, advice, and love ●

## Hope beyond hardship

*Eriko Kawasaki looks at the legacy of Cambodian's civil war*

Cambodia enjoyed prosperity during the golden age of the Khmer Empire (9<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries AD). If you visit Siem Reap, you will definitely be amazed by fabulous temples and monuments built at this time, such as Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom.

During the civil war of the 1970s, however, the country experienced many hardships. The Khmer Rouge turned the whole country into a labor camp and are said to have killed 1.5 million Cambodians, many of whom were educated people such as teachers, doctors and monks.

In 1992, Cambodia was reborn as a democratic country with many prob-



*Nita and friends in English Island*

lems unsolved. According to statistics (2011) from the Asian Development Bank, 8.28 million Cambodians, more than half the country's population, live on less than US\$2 a day. The UN ranks Cambodia as one of the least developed countries (LDC).

We hear sad stories about Cambodians stepping on landmines in rural areas, or of children selling souvenirs instead of going to school. But most of us don't know what the biggest problems for Cambodia are today. **Ratananita Sol** outlined what she thinks are the most serious.

### Increase in traffic accidents

Every year thousands of people are killed in traffic accidents. Drivers do not respect law and they drive even when they are drunk.

### Poor quality health care

Besides the lack of hospitals, doctors and nurses, Cambodian people have lost their trust in doctors and hospitals all over the country. Those who can afford it travel to Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore to receive health care.

### Loss of natural resources

Cambodia has lost so many forests, home to thousands of unique species, because illegal companies have come to Cambodia to clear the land for various purposes such as farming.

Though Cambodia is struggling with such difficulties, young people like Nita and other students who visited Shoin, are full of energy and willing to work hard to make their country better. We can see hope in their smiling faces for the bright future of their country ●

## Jobs for all?

*Chika Matsui examines the opportunities for Cambodian women*

The employment situation for women in Cambodia is very different depending on whether they live in the city or the countryside. The type of jobs they do are also different. In the countryside, most women live in poverty. They do housework and take

care of their children, cultivate the soil and work in the field, but they hardly get a salary. They sink in poverty day after day.

In the city, the number of working women has been increasing since the year 2000. The employment rate for women is about 71%. It is much easier for women living in the city to attend school, but not all can find jobs after finishing university. About 70% of women graduate get jobs; about 20% do not, but some prefer to get married and their husbands sometimes don't want them to work.

Popular jobs for women are accountants, bank staff, cashiers, receptionists, cashiers, nurses and teachers. They prefer jobs related to communication. They work eight hours a day, but don't get paid overtime if they work more.

In Japan, women worry whether to quit their job after having a baby because there is little child-care service. However in Cambodia women don't stop working because they receive three months' maternity leave. Also their parents look after their grandchildren.

It's easier for Cambodian women in the city to continue work after marriage than for Japanese and they can work until the age of retirement (62-64).

In the future, I hope women in the countryside will also be able to have jobs and gain pleasure through their work. Women should be given the chance to have a job because they can play an active role in society ●

## The secret of their success

*Shiori Harada learns why Cambodians are so good at English*

The native language of Cambodia is Khmer but many Cambodians can speak English very well.

According to Nita Sol, English education in Cambodia is like that in Japan. They start learning English as a required subject in junior high school and study reading, writing and speaking. The teachers are Cambodian. They study English for 6 to 7 years.

In Cambodia, students study English at private schools. Nita used to study at a private school and says, "There are native speakers at private school so I can listen to real English."

Nowadays in Japan many children and students go to private school and speak English but 10 years ago, not many did. Cambodians have been going to private school and speaking English for many years.

Cambodians speak English during the English class: they don't speak Khmer. This is important to become fluent in English. But in Japan, teachers teach English in Japanese and students study English only for examinations tests. They don't speak English except for pronunciation practice of vocabulary. After class, Cambodian students talk to their friends in English. They often use English.

Cambodians are not shy so they speak English even if they make a mistake. But Japanese are shy and afraid of making mistakes. Although few Cambodian students have opportunities for study abroad compared to Japanese they are still able to speak English much better because they are more aggressive about studying English. This is the big point.

Cambodians put into practice what they have learned without a sense of shame. And Cambodian students study harder than Japanese students. If you want to speak English, you must study hard and you need communication with native speakers. You should use English in daily life ●

## The dirty truth

*Honami Shirase reports on health issues plaguing Cambodia*

The water problem of Cambodia is very serious. Cambodians in the cities boil tap water before they drink it. However, in rural areas, some people are still drinking water from a river, pond or well. As a result many suffer from diarrhea. According to UNICEF, approximately one in seven Cambodian children die of this disease before the age of five. A big cause of this high death rate is hygiene, especially inferior water quality in the rural regions.

In Cambodia, most infrastructure was destroyed during the long civil war. At last, water and sewage have facilities have begun to be maintained in urban areas.

Only about 40% of the total population have access to toilets. Most people in rural and remote areas do not have toilets at home.

There are many hospitals in the city but few in the countryside. In addition, hygiene in medical facilities is a problem. Most of the public hospitals in the city and provinces are not very clean. Hygiene is still a concern for people who receive health care services from them. However, the Cambodian Ministry of Health and NGOs are now working to improve this problem.

National health insurance is not established in Cambodia like Japan and there are no tax deductions for medical expenses. Therefore, a patient must bear medical expenses in full.

Cambodia is a country where it is hard to live safely even now ●

## At home

*Yuko Ishii notices differences and similarities between Japanese and Khmer family life*

There are many different and common points in family life between Cambodia and Japan. First, typically, we have four to five people in a family in Japan. In Cambodian cities it is also the same. But in the countryside, there are often more than ten people in each family.

According to Nita Sol, most Cambodians live like a Japanese family, eating dinner together, watching TV and chatting at home. They don't go outside at night because it's more dangerous than in the daytime.

In Japan, most mothers cook, clean and do the washing. Nita says, "In Cambodia, some people hire a maid for housework, but only in the city. But children also help do housework like in Japan." She adds, "Mothers prepare lunch like a *bento* for the family but most children go back home for lunch." *Bento* is a common point with Japan.

On weekends or holidays, Cambodians go to the beach or mountain to enjoy time with family. Most Japanese families only do this on special days like big holidays.

Cambodian people cherish family birthdays and they celebrate all together. In the countryside, they have a big party after the harvest. Cambodian people both in cities and in the countryside have important events in their family. Someday, I want to see both styles of family life in Cambodia!

## Cambodian vacation

*Ratananita Sol advises Mii Luu Thi on what to do in her country*

Cambodia is a popular tourist destination and many Japanese visit there these days.

Cambodia has two seasons: hot and wet (April to October), with rain almost every day, and hot and dry (November to March). The best months to visit are from November to February.

Phnom Penh is the capital of Cambodia. Two of the best spots to see are the Royal Palace and the National

Museum, where there are many historic sculptures that will teach you about Cambodian art.

By now you may be hungry so head off to the Central Market to taste local food such as *mi-sha*, something like fried noodles topped with a sauce called *nam-pla*. Cambodians eat a dish called *baisaichuruku* for breakfast. *Bai* means 'rice', *sai* means 'meat' and *churu-ku* means 'pig'.

You can get around the city by taxi or *Tuk-Tuk*. To travel outside the city, you can take a bus or rent a van.

Next you should visit Angkor Wat Temple and other temples in Siem Reap Province. Angkor Wat Temple was established by Suryavarman II in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and registered as a world heritage site in 1992.

How much does it cost to visit Cambodia? The return flight ticket from Japan is approximately ¥75,000; accommodation and food are very cheap once you get there ●

## Looking good

*Nozomi Hamasaki discovers what's cool to wear in the tropics*

Cambodia is located in the tropical zone so it's hot and humid almost the whole year and the fashion doesn't vary much from one season to another. Men wear short-sleeved shirts and pants, or shorts for casual wear, and women wear a shirt with a traditional skirt called a *sarong*.

There's only a short winter fashion season in Cambodia. Nita Sol says, "People usually dress the same but only add a coat or jacket during winter."

In Cambodia, traditional menswear is a shirt made of pure silk with pants. Traditional costume for women is a shirt made from a special textile call *pak* or *pamoung* and a silk skirt called *sompot hol*.

For weddings, men dress up in traditional silk shirts while women decorate themselves in a dress made of different kinds of fabric or a silk skirt call *hol*. For funerals, people wear white and black and make-up or jewelry is considered inappropriate.

According to Nita Sol, Cambodian students are required to wear uniform at school. This is a white shirt and blue pants or skirt.

Jeans and a variety of T-shirts along with sneakers or flippers are fashionable for men while women dress in shorts, mini-skirt with top tank or T-shirt. Teenagers and young adults like Korean or Thai fashion.

There are plenty of places to shop for clothes and the biggest selection can be found at the market or supermarket. But there are also many boutique shops and even the Night Market.

Because of the heat, Cambodians prefer a simple or casual style like Asian style and anything that is easy and comfortable to wear ●

## Time out

*Yumemi Uemura chills with  
Khmer youth*

Leisure time in Cambodia, according to Nita Sol, resembles that in Japan. She spends her free time with her family and her friends shopping and chatting at a café and so on. “I usually spend my holiday going to the beach and sightseeing. I don’t go in the city. Cambodia is a beautiful place so I recommend the countryside.”

There are many holidays in Cambodia – 20 to 30 a year – and every weekend is a holiday. There’s a festival every month. In October they have 5 days’ holiday. Nita says she does not study during the holidays: “Only before examination, but I prefer to go out with my friends and my family.”

The older generation enjoys sports like boxing. Young people play soccer and use social media such as LINE. In both Cambodia and Japan, young people use mobile phones. In the city, they do not watch much TV but usually listen to the news on the radio. Cambodian women do not exercise very much but men enjoy soccer.

Nita’s comments show that every situation is similar to Japan. Young people here too usually spend their time using social media while traditional sports are becoming unpopular ●

## Customs and traditions

*Ayano Hara learns how to behave  
properly in Cambodia*

According to Nita Sol, Cambodia has experienced big changes in recent years.

Cambodians can start drinking and smoking from the age of 18. Some people start drinking from the age of 16, but it is very unusual. The image of women who drink and smoke is bad.

They do not make a noise when they eat. Normally families all gather to have a meal. No-one starts to eat until the father begins. It is bad manners to pick up a dish to eat from it.

Cambodians use body language to greet each other. It is different

according to the person they greet. When they greet friends, they place their hands together in front of their stomachs with the fingers pointing upwards. They touch their chin with their fingers in the case of elders. When greeting their parents, their fingers touch the nose. Hands are placed in front of the forehead in the case of the king. Although slightly different in practice, this custom seems to be similar to the way of showing respect in Japan by bowing ●

## Tastes of Cambodia

*Juri Yamamoto tempts us  
with some exotic and unusual dishes*

Cambodian dishes are not too spicy so they are easy for Japanese to eat but the cuisine also includes some strange dishes.

The usual seasoning is a strong-flavoured fish paste made from and kept in a clay jar for a period. Cambodians eat insects such as fried spiders. They also eat fried frog and eggs with unhatched chicks.

There are some slightly peculiar flavors such as bitter melon soup. Bitter melon is a vegetable, not the fruit that we know.

Cambodia is famous for spice, such as pepper, and for fruits. The durian has a distinctive and unpleasant smell but it’s called ‘the king of fruits’ and is very popular in South-east Asia. The mangosteen is known as ‘the queen of fruits’ – it’s beautiful to look at and delicious to eat.

In addition there are sapodilla, starfruits, pineapple, coconuts, papaya, and bananas, too. Cambodia is famous for tamarind which is used in cooking.

Cambodians love sweets. There are many delicious cakes made with plenty of coconut milk. Young Cambodians enjoy these local desserts as well as ice-cream and cakes ●

## A fine romance

*Sarina Murakami takes a look at  
dating and marriage, Khmer style*

There is a big gap between life in the city and countryside in Cambodia and there are also differences when it comes to marriage.

The average age of marriage in the city is over 25. On the other hand, it is between 16 and 18 in the countryside. Love marriages are common in the city, but arranged marriages are usual in the countryside. Most city women continue to work after marriage but those in the

countryside become housewives, and do housework, grow crops, take care of animals, and so on.

In Japan the word *ikumen* (husbands who help take care of children and do housework) was a vogue word a few years ago. According to Nita Sol, such men are not common in Cambodia.

In wedding ceremonies, women wear a white wedding dress and a traditional dress made of silk. The dishes eaten at the party are Chinese or traditional Cambodian ones.

The number of international couples is increasing in Cambodia. However, if foreigners marry Cambodian women they need to fulfil certain conditions required by the Government. For example, the husband has to be less than 50 years old and his monthly income must exceed US\$2,550. This is because the Government wants Cambodian women to marry safely and to prevent human trafficking.

## Dating

Popular dating activities are talking at a café, walking in the park, going shopping, and so on. Aeon, a Japanese shopping mall popular with families and couples, opened in Phnom Penh in June 2014.

It’s a curious point whether men or women pay the expenses on a date. ‘Going Dutch’ is not common for Cambodian couples, so they pay the cost by turn.

Cities in Cambodia will develop more because of tourism and foreign enterprise. Cambodians’ lives also will change with women’s empowerment. On the other hand, what will the gap between the city and countryside be in the future?



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