

Kingdom of Cambodia

Status: Constitutional monarchy in Southeast Asia
Area: 69,898 sq. miles
Population: 15,708,756 (2015 est.)
Currency: U.S. \$1 = 3999 riels. (The U.S. dollar is widely used and accepted by post offices.)



Cambodia is located on the Indochinese Peninsula. Colonized by migrants from India in the first century, it developed into the Kingdom of Angkor. By the 10th century, it dominated the region. Its culture gave the world scores of beautiful temples, including the famed Angkor Wat. But growing pressure from the Thais in the west, and later the Annamites in the east, reduced it to a vassal state. Spanish and Portuguese ships first visited the area in the 16th century, but had little lasting influence. After a series of territorial losses to Thailand, Cambodia became a French protectorate in 1863. Over the next 80 years, the French pushed the Thais out of eastern Cambodia and stabilized Cambodia's borders with Vietnam. The Cambodians developed a new-found pride in their history and national heritage.

The French merged Cambodia into its Indochina colony in 1887 under a governor general resident in Hanoi. With the fall of France in 1940, Thailand seized eastern Cambodia and Japanese forces occupied Indochina. On March 9, 1945 the Japanese removed the French administrators and encouraged Cambodia to declare independence. The French returned in late 1945 to an Indochina racked in civil war.

The French recognized Cambodian independence in 1953. But the political unrest continued. Despite its proclaimed neutrality, Cambodia was caught up in the Vietnam War. In 1975, the ruthless Khmer Rouge leader, Pol Pot, took control of the country. His reign led to the death of about a quarter of the Cambodian population. Vietnamese forces drove him out of power in 1979. The United Nations-aided transition reinstated the kingdom in 1993. Today, Cambodia enjoys a fast-growing economy, though poverty remains widespread.

The French set up military post offices in Cambodia in 1865.

On January 1, 1873, the first public post office was opened in Phnom Penh offering stamps of the French colonies. In 1882, service was broadened outside the capital. In 1892, stamps of Indochina were placed on sale in Cambodia. Indochina stamps were used until 1951 when Cambodian stamps were placed on sale. Some issues of the Vichy government did not reach Cambodia and fighting after the war resulted in stamp supplies being erratic.

The political changes were reflected in the postage stamps. The 1951 issue was inscribed "Kingdom of Cambodia" and later simply "Cambodge." After Lon Nol's coup in 1971, stamps were inscribed "Khmer Republic" or "Cambodge." Pol Pot tried to eliminate the money and no stamps were issued from 1974 to 1980. After the Vietnam invasion, stamps were inscribed "People's Republic of Kampuchea." In 1989, it became "State of Cambodia." After the restoration of the monarchy in 1993, use of "Kingdom of Cambodia" resumed.

There is a post office in each of Cambodia's 25 provinces. But the typical Cambodian is not directly touched by postal services. There are no deliveries. Businesses are required to have boxes in the post offices from which they pick up their mail. On those rare occasions when the post office receives a letter for a private citizen, it sends word by phone or messenger that there is mail to be picked up.



The General Post Office in Phnom Penh appears on this 1971 stamp, Scott 252.



An Apsara, or Apsarasa, a female spirit of the clouds and waters in Hindu and Buddhist mythology, appears on the first stamp from Cambodia issued in 1951, Scott 1.



A 20-piaster showing the East Gate in Angkor, from a 20-stamp set in 1954-55, Scott 36.



One of a set of seven fire trucks stamps in 1987, Scott 823.



King Suramarit on a 1960 stamp, Scott 74.



In 1983, Cambodia issued a set of five stamps for the upcoming Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo. The nation's stamps are now inscribed "Kampuchea," reflecting political influence from Vietnam, Scott 443.