# Phnom Penh "The Pearl of the Orient"

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YOU'VE trusted your eyes your whole life, but visit Cambodia and you just may start doubting them. Well that sums up my thoughts in a nutshell when I landed up in Phnom Penh last month. I decided to fly to Cambodia because as a travel agent, I am always running out of new destinations to offer my customers and adding Cambodia to our new brochures is an excellent excuse to fly.



The entrance to the national museum.

Would you believe Cambodia offers Bangladeshi travelers "Visa on arrival "? But don't you even dare to land up in the country and expect to cross the immigration line. There is no way a Bangladeshi traveler can leave the airport without a bond / guarantee by a local company/Hotel/ citizen . Unless you have a form filled out by your counterparts/hotel representative/relatives or friends in Cambodia who act as your guarantor, you are likely to spend the night in the airport and head on back to Dhaka on the next flight. You can obtain a visa from Delhi, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore but the visa procedures are lengthy and some of the financial documents required are absurd. My turning up in Phnom Penh was to sign the agreement with a local company who will act as guarantor. I don't mean to scare away potential visitors, the Cambodians are very friendly people and even the immigration staff, the friendliest I have seen, they smile, grin, wink while you wait. ...but you need that signed guarantee letter.

Landing at Phnom Penh Airport I am greeted by my guarantor at the Visa on Arrival counter. It takes a little longer than the usual to get the processing done but I am escorted to the arrival hall after 30 minutes where two gentlemen are waiting for me. One is my Cambodian driver and the other is a fellow Bangladeshi who heads one of the Bangladeshi pharmaceutical companies doing business in Phnom Penh. My Bangladeshi friend follows me with his car while I am led through the city by the Cambodian driver giving me a narrative in his broken English. He says people in Phnom Penh go to bed early, he isn't kidding, the roads are deserted except for a few cars and motorbikes, I am thinking well it is a week night after all, I wasn't expecting Las Vegas.

I am taken to Holiday Villa Hotel, a Malaysian hotel chain on Monivong street and as I step out of the car, I know I have made a mistake. The lobby setting irritates me and the relaxed staff even more. I am taken to the top floor to a massive room that hasn't seen renovations in a decade and as if this single man needs more space, the connecting door to the second massive deluxe room is wide open. There is no way I can close the door , giving me the opportunity to sleep in both the beds if I want . I decide to order room service and the phone does not work so I go down to the restaurant and the waiter says the chef just left and there is no room service after 1130 pm. loneliness is a starving man sprawled in a two bedroom hotel room flipping channels on the TV.

Next morning at 7 am, a ravenous Bangladeshi hot trots to the breakfast buffet, cutting the queue to hit the hot food section only to be stopped in his tracks when confronted by a huge Malaysian breakfast buffet !!! What else can go wrong in this trip ? No room service , no phone , Internet in the business centre is down and Malay roti and chicken curry for *breakfast* ? Starving and cursing , I step out by 7: 10 into the busy Monigvong Street with the sun shining brightly, a glorious day to explore the city of Phnom Penh.