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◀ ANGKOR WAT Siem Reap, Cambodia

VISITORS PER YEAR: Around 2.1 million

A masterpiece of Khmer archaeology, the sprawling complex of Angkor takes up a 400 sq km swathe of Cambodian jungle, scattered with temples dating from the ninth to the 15th century. There is nowhere quite like it.

FRONT DOOR: Most visitors base themselves in Siem Reap. An Angkor Pass costs from US\$20 (£14), and the majority enter via the west gate (open from 5am) and head to Angkor Wat for sunrise and Phnom Bakheng for sunset – beautiful viewpoints, but expect crowds.

BACK DOOR: New rules affecting early visitors mean Angkor Wat, Phnom Bakheng, Pre Rup and the lake of Srah Srang are the only sites now accessible at sunrise, with the rest of the park opening at 7:30am. This has cut down your options for early-morning alternatives, but attack these bigger sites just after sun-up, when the tour groups leave for breakfast, or during lunch and it will thin crowds out a little. However, there are plenty of impressive alternative temples to see...



EXPERT TIPS: Andrew Booth, founder of ABOUTAisa, is author of *The Angkor Guidebook* (angkorguidebook.com) – all profits of the book support local children's education. "The season you visit is important for avoiding crowds.

Throughout June, July and August, it usually rains two out of every three days, so the standard travel advice is to visit Angkor between November and March (peak time). But this is misguided. During the summer months, rainfall before noon is usually one day in seven, and the mornings are often sunny. If you visit then and arrive early, you'll beat both the tour groups and the rain.

"Make sure you visit some of the lesser-known temples while you're there too, such as Bakong, Beng Mealea (early in the day) or even Banteay Thom and Chau Srei Vibol. These latter ones are almost sure to be deserted and are equally beautiful. You may have to walk a while off the road or even cycle to reach them, but they reward your efforts with magical solitude. Within the main temple area, also visit Preah Khan, Ta Nei and walk on the walls of Angkor Thom, which have fewer tourists."

"One of my personal favourite side trips is to walk away from the road between the wall and the inside of the moat. This is good especially on the north side where you can often find ripe mangoes in late spring."

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2010, hidden 'graffiti' was found on the walls of Angkor's temples – some believe it was painted as far back as the 1500s.



DJEMAA EL-FNA Marrakech, Morocco

VISITORS PER YEAR: Around 1.5 million

Known as much for its atmosphere (and even recognised by UNESCO for it) as its design, Djemaa el-Fna square is the bustling heart of chaotic Marrakech. To reduce the crowds isn't the point here – the crowds

are part of the experience. But with so much fighting for your attention, it pays to know what is worth bothering with.

FRONT DOOR: Evening (post 6pm) is the main reason to visit the square, when a melee of touts, poets, pickpockets, *oud* (lute) players, storytellers, snake charmers, acrobats, *gnaoua* dancers, henna tattooists, food stalls and juice salesmen collide in an explosion of noise, colour, crowds and confusion.

BACK DOOR: The entertainment follows the hordes, and vice versa. Lose one and you lose the other, and during the day the square just doesn't have the same vibe. Be sure to skip the henna tattooists for the nearby Henna Art Café (hennacafemarrakech.com), which uses only safe products. The storytellers are great, if you speak Arabic. But the food is the real draw here, so long as you know what to order...



EXPERT TIPS: Amanda Ponzio-Mouttaki blogs at marocmama.com and also runs food tours around Marrakech (marrakechfoodtours.com).

"There are lots of cafés overlooking the square. For a good view, choose Café Glacier on the corner edge, overlooking Kotoubia mosque. To the north-east, near the souks, you'll also find Mechoui Alley. From noon, its stalls start slicing up its namesake dish of *mechoui*, lamb roasted whole in an underground clay oven. It's sold by the half or quarter kilo – take away a bag for 30MAD (£2) with fresh bread and olives.

"The food stalls of Djemaa el-Fna set up from 4pm and open until well past midnight. Head there after 7pm and stick with grilled meats, such as merguez sausage and chicken skewers. Try *baolo*, which is cow offal stuffed into bread that has been dipped in dripping. It's a local favourite and you'll find it at any of the *tangia* (slow-roasted lamb) stalls. Snails are common too, and even if you can't stomach them, try the broth they come in – it has a unique flavour.

"For fresh local spices, don't buy them in the local 'pharmacies' or fancy shops – they just buy them themselves from the small *hanuts* (grocers) that litter the city. These also sell dried fruits and nuts, and if you walk towards the police station in the north of the square, you'll see an alley that runs behind it filled with plenty of these shops to explore." 📍

