

Seattle University School of Law
Cambodia Legal Internship
Intern Report: Summer 2013

To: Junsen Ohno, International Programs Administrator
From: Jamie Nystrom, Documentation Center of Cambodia Summer Associate
Re: Report on Summer 2013 DC-Cam Internship

Report on Internship at DC-Cam

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Preparation and Travel

The first things I did after being accepted was take care of plane tickets and medical preparations. I booked tickets in March, because the earlier you can book the cheaper the tickets will be. I used Kayak.com to compare prices and found pretty reasonable flights. Because I knew I planned to travel to Australia after, I booked one way tickets, but round trip tickets from Seattle could be found for under 1200.

Next I completed the necessary medical and other paperwork. I set up an appointment with the school health center for five dollars and was able to get my tetanus, typhoid, and MMR shots up to date, the cost will vary on your insurance coverage.

I got everything turned in by mid April, and my internship began a week after finals in the end of May so that there was nothing to worry about during finals. The dates of the internship are not set by DC-Cam, but they prefer you are there for at least 9 weeks. I stayed for about 10 but wish I had done 11 or 12.

April is the hottest month in Cambodia, but May is very hot too, so I had to prepare appropriate clothing. After June it is in the rainy season and cools off a bit, but generally waking up at 7am to go to work still meant being soaked in sweat on a relatively short walk. I got loose, breathable clothes. The expected attire is business casual, so as a man I wore button up shirts and khaki type pants. I was able to find good looking clothes for hot weather at REI in Seattle before I left.

Although there is not malaria in Phnom Penh or around Angkor Wat, it is present in most of the outlying provinces, so it is best to bring malaria medication. I was the only intern who took doxycycline, but I learned that it was a great advantage. Even though it is a daily pill, it is also an antibiotic, so I was the only intern who never suffered from food poisoning. One of the other interns was hospitalized from food poisoning, and everyone else seemed to miss at least a few days from having stomach problems. Although there are pharmacies in Cambodia, there is a strong distrust of them so bring whatever medications you will need for the entire duration. I also brought bug spray, 100% DEET for going to more remote locations and 30% for night and other use. Because there are many diseases in Cambodia transmittable by mosquitos, such as Dengue Fever, I thought it in my best interest to do what I could to mitigate such risks with a little repellent.

You will want to notify your bank of your travel plans if you choose to use ATMs. I brought travellers cheques which had only a 2% exchange fee (most atms had a flat fee+3-5% fee), but your bank may offer better travel services for ATMs so you may not need travellers

cheques. Cheques were somewhat inconvenient because banks close before the work day ended, so I could only get cash on the weekends. Cambodia uses the USD for everything so no need to worry about money exchanges.

Sometime during late April, Chris sent all the incoming interns a list of possible projects to work on. I would recommend spending some time at the DC-Cam website learning about the organization as well as the website for the ECCC and the Cambodia Trial Monitor to get a feel for what is going on and what interests you. This is important because the summer goes really fast and you will wish you had more time at the end to finish your assignment.

You will want to get at least 6 passport photos, possible more if you want to travel outside Cambodia. You will need one for your visa when you arrive, and another one every month when you renew. You can get a tourist visa but will have to leave the country before expiring, so I planned my trips to Malaysia and Thailand to coincide with when I needed to renew. You can renew through the office at DC-Cam every month but you need to remember to do it a week early because otherwise you might miss the deadline and have to pay extra fees.

When you arrive at the airport you will need 25\$ to pay for the visa. You should get the forms to fill out on the airplane, and when you arrive there will be a line where you give the application and your passport, and then another you wait in until called to pay.

Internship Work

Working at DC-Cam was really interesting and rewarding. Your primary task will be to write a research report of some type (can be in the form of a Memo, handbook, or law review article). I ended up choosing to do research on the legacy of Internal Rules of the ECCC, but it took about 2 weeks to really narrow down to that topic and wished I had spent more time before arrival learning about how the ECCC worked. Work hours are from 7:30-5pm, but sometimes people stay later to work more. Lunch is usually from 12-1:30, and it usually takes that long to get food, especially if you go in a larger group because service is rather slow at restaurants.

Youk is the director of the Sleuk Rith Institute (DC-Cam is part of that) and a very inspirational figure. I recommend doing some research on him before you go. DC-Cam is going through a transition now to branch out into new areas as an organization (such as the new museum DC-Cam will be building in Siem Reap), so we did not see him as other interns in past years may have, but it was a great experience when we did meet. He knows Professor Ron Slye from Seattle U so if you know Ron feel free to mention it.

Chris is the legal counsel and head of the intern program. Not all of the interns are law students, as they are also seeking interns to help with the museum and social enterprise projects. Chris is very friendly and can offer a lot of help, but remember that he is also very busy so try to do as much as you can on your own or asking other interns.

Most days are spent working on your own research projects as an intern, so you need to be able to work independently and self-motivated as no one else will be researching the same thing as you. There will be other smaller assignments that will require your attention that vary depending on the current needs of DC-Cam. For instance, one such project involved writing a newspaper article urging the Cambodian Legislature not to adopt a genocide-gag law that was being contemplated. You will likely become quiet familiar with Cambodia politics. I was lucky enough to be there during elections, which happen only every 5 years. Although there was some post election unrest, it was an interesting experience to watch. Some of the interns were able to observe voting booths as international observers.

You will learn a lot about international law as well as civil law systems, as the ECCC uses French civil law, so I would recommend learning a little about that before you go. The legal work mostly revolves around question of international law that are unknown, so you actually have the opportunity to do very novel research. Many of the projects focused on the legacy of the ECCC because it is not clear how much longer the court will continue. DC-Cam is a pretty well-known NGO, especially in Cambodia, so it is a great opportunity to learn how it is to work internationally in the law. DC-Cam is also involved in areas that do not involve international criminal law, and there are opportunities to do work on things ranging from questions of heritage law to economic integration within ASEAN.

Because of the limited space for interns at DC-Cam, usually a few interns every day would work at the National Museum, where DC-Cam has space set aside for it. This was actually one of my favorite places to go because it was quiet, had more reliable internet, and was close to the best restaurant in Phnom Penh (an Indonesian Restaurant called Warung Bali that had plates for around 2\$).

The Cambodian staff that works in the same office were really wonderful, kind people. I highly recommend getting to know them as soon as you get there. The ones who work in the main room are on the trial monitor, and sometimes they ask for your help editing their reports. You should definitely try to bring your bluebook. You will most likely get some assignments for editing as part of the Cambodia Law and Policy Journal that DC-Cam has begun, so you will get some journal experience.

It is possible that you will be able to go on assignments out to the provinces and other areas. Such assignments included genocide training at army camps and education efforts in the provinces. Many of the interns also went on a trip to meet a local judge. If the ECCC is still in session when you arrive, you will most likely go observe several times early on to help you get an understanding of what is happening. Do not close your eyes or look like you are not paying attention in the observing area because the guards will ask you to leave.

The most important thing to do while working is to set goal posts with Chris on when to have things done, such as an outline and various stages of drafting, because the summer goes by so fast that if you are not careful you will have a very rushed last couple of weeks. Depending on what research you do, you may be meeting with local attorneys, defense counsel, prosecutors, and members of UN agencies or NGOs. DC-Cam is very well connected so there are lots of great opportunities to meet members of the international law community.

Living in Phnom Penh

Phnom Penh is a developing city and will not have many things you may be used to. Emergency services do not practically exist for you to count on. The roads are very chaotic and crossing the street can be scary at first, as the traffic never stops. The traffic is mostly “motos” (scooters and motor bikes and such) and SUVs. Accidents are quite common. One of the interns was injured while getting a ride on a moto, and several fatal accidents were witnessed by many of the interns over the summer, so I do not recommend ever taking a ride on one. You can walk most places, especially if you live close to DC-Cam. I lived at the Golden Gate Hotel for my first week because I found an apartment nearby with another intern. I recommend getting a room at the Golden Gate for the first two nights because if you get the “deluxe” room for 35/night, they will pick you up from the airport, which can save you the hassle of otherwise trying to give directions to a taxi or tuk tuk driver. Tuk Tuks are everywhere and will offer you a ride every time they see you. A reasonable fare from the airport to Wat Langka/Independence monument

(the area near DC Cam) is \$6-7. If you are uncomfortable haggling, you will always be ripped off. Most interns would share tuk tuks when going out to dinner at night to places that would be a longer walk, and 3-4\$ is reasonable for most places. Taxi's are more expensive, but from the airport you can go anywhere in the city for 9\$, but is more expensive and centrally managed otherwise, and you do not see them driving around much. One of the first things you will notice is that giving directions with street numbers is quite useless, and most drivers do not know where things are, so you essentially need to be able to give turn by turn directions, either looking at a map first and eventually by learning where the known landmarks are.

I took Khmer lessons after work for about a month with two other interns and really enjoyed it. The Cambodian staff loves to teach you too when you do this. The language is not necessary to know for the internship, but I think it adds a lot to the experience and learning the local culture. Cambodian people are some of the nicest so it is definitely worth trying to learn some Khmer.

Food in Cambodia is pretty good, you can eat reasonably well for \$3-6 a meal, or even less if you will eat more local food. I enjoyed going to lunch with the Cambodian staff to a small place around the corner that the interns simply called "the canteen" because there was no English sign. It was essentially a cart with different home cooked Khmer food every day and you go in a group and point at things and they serve you. It costs \$1.25. Other delicious, cheap places included the Chinese Noodle House which was \$1.50-2 and that place made fresh noodles out in front. As I mentioned above Warung Bali is a great restaurant too. If you are willing to pay more, there are more western style places as well. There is also several supermarkets, but because they are geared for westerners and higher income people, you may not save any money cooking yourself unless you go to open air markets.

You can stay in a guest house or hotel for the whole time if you prefer. Most places will have month rates for about 450 (the Golden Gate does this if you stay in the 20/night quality room). You can also get in a tuk tuk and tell the driver to drive you around looking for rent rooms. Mine was 600/month so with 2 people was less than a hotel and quite spacious, although be advised that electricity is expensive so don't use the AC too much.

Most places in Phnom Penh have wifi if you order food. There is also wifi at DC-Cam but it was eternally plagued with problems, so early on you should download as much as you can to read in the morning in case it dies for the day. Internet is also generally very slow so don't count on making skype calls or downloads reliably. Power outages were not generally a problem but it did go out on occasion.

Other Experiences

Cambodia has a lot to offer. Most weekends interns would try to take trips, so I found a couple that wanted to travel at the same time. The most important place to go of course is Angkor Wat, but other popular places include Sihanoukville (the beach), Kampot, Battambang, and mountain villages. Buses are cheap, but travel is slow and unreliable. It is also relatively easy to fly to other Southeast Asian countries while in Cambodia. I recommend making a list of places you want to go and buying plane tickets well in advance, because they can be extremely cheap (around \$100 roundtrip) if you don't wait until the last minute. Many of the interns made a trip to Burma together during my last week (so I did not go), but it is fun to get to travel around a bit while in Cambodia, because you can see most everything to see in Phnom Penh over a weekend or two.

At night one of the popular activities is to do aerobic dancing in the main park, so feel free to go with other interns and the Cambodian staff. Compared to some other nearby nations, Cambodia generally feels safe, but still be aware of your surroundings and don't carry around easily stolen bags and purses. I always walked with other interns after dark as well.

Overall Cambodia is a wonderful experience, so get the most as you can out of it!