

Seattle University School of Law  
Cambodia Legal Internship  
Intern Report – Summer 2011

**To:** Junsen Ohno, International Programs Administrator  
**From:** Amanda Banik, Documentation Center of Cambodia Summer Associate  
**Re:** Report for Summer 2011 DC-Cam Internship

**My Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) Experience**

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**Internship Work Assignment:**

**1. Intern Memo**

The work was great. It was cutting edge international legal research and gave us the opportunity to get deep down into something we liked. Anne, our supervisor, compiled a list of topics we could choose from and those who arrived on the first day she was available to accept us (I was in this group) got first pick of those she compiled. I chose a procedural law issue because I wanted my topic to stretch beyond the court in Cambodia. I was able to compare rules at the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and take note of the lack of comparable rules in other tribunals. Further, given a comparable rule at the ICTY, I was able to get into case law and various motions and orders pertaining to that rule.

Not only did I get to study one rule in particular, but the Cambodian judicial system, on which the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) is based, is a civil law system. So, to properly address my topic, I had to consider some of the fundamental differences between the two systems. This gave me the chance to work with a totally different legal tradition than the common law tradition we learn in the US. This will be a huge asset doing any sort of international work.

The only negative side for me, personally, was the inherently quiet nature of research based work. I was unaccustomed to being so sedentary and so focused on one single issue that I found it difficult to work to my maximum level of productivity and efficiency. As a result, I wound up taking on a smaller project as well just to have a couple projects happening at the same time. This worked well for me and Anne gave me the latitude to do this.

Anne gave all of the interns a great deal of freedom doing our work. She was available to chat through ideas with and to get feedback regardless of where we were in the research/drafting process. She has high writing standards and a great deal of writing experience which makes working with her very valuable and informative.

Youk Chhang, the Director of DC-Cam is one of the most friendly and passionate people I have ever met. He is always willing to share about Cambodian history, the history of the Khmer Rouge, or his views on something happening in the court. His opinions are highly respected and anytime he was willing to share about anything, everyone nearby would listen. The full time staff at DC-Cam refer to him as Uncle because he ensures that each of the staff receive graduate degrees typically out of the country. He helps them track down and apply for scholarships but is tough on them like a caring uncle would be. I have yet to hear of anyone who knows but does not respect, admire, and seek to please Youk. I consider it a great honor to have gotten to know him for just the brief period over the summer.

## **2. Attendance at DC-Cam Meetings and Court Visits**

In addition to working on your own writing project, you will attend some all staff meetings and visit the court. These will vary in frequency and subject matter depending on what is going on during the summer you are in Cambodia. In the summer of 2011, we went to the court to see the Initial Hearing that started off Case 002 and also had a variety of all staff meetings with DC-Cam. Unfortunately, court was not in session most of the summer so we had limited chances to see the proceedings themselves. However, we did get to meet with a variety of the participants. We met two different defense teams, we met with the international co-prosecutor, and we met with Judge Dame Sylvia Cartwright. In all of these meetings we were able to ask questions pertaining both to our research topics as well as pertaining to areas of personal curiosity.

## **3. Outreach**

The externs all had the opportunity to accompany DC-Cam staff as they did their outreach activities. The NGO has a variety of projects and the one that I was able to attend had to do with educating the teachers on the history of the Khmer Rouge. These teachers were from all over the country and taught high school level history. DC-Cam staff wrote a book that the Ministry of Education has endorsed and is using to teach children about the Khmer Rouge, so staff have to teach the teachers how to educate using this book. There are many different projects that externs can attend and typically the extern will be expected to write a short article about the trip afterwards.

### **Outside of Work:**

(also see previous interns memos as well)

#### **1. Travel**

Cambodia is incredible. The history and culture there in the temples and towns are incredible. The small villages and area surrounding the primary Angkor Wat temples are also full of old (but sometimes not as old) temples and pagodas. The people are incredibly friendly and were lovely everywhere I travelled.

We learned from Youk that Cambodian people will smile rather than apologize for bumping into another person in a crowded market or for interrupting, etc. This was an invaluable insight for me. I really tried to incorporate smiling in instances that American culture might tell you to look apologetic or unsure (as when bumping into someone or trying to get someone's attention). Though it felt unnatural and sometimes strange, smiling went a very long way for me in developing friendships with Cambodian people. I highly suggest you give this a try even if it feels a bit awkward at first.

In addition to having a wonderful experience in Cambodia itself, it is very well connected with many other Asian countries – particularly those in Southeast Asia. Though I personally only visited Vietnam while on this trip, many of the other interns took multiple country trips through many countries in the region. Though the transportation system is limited to buses (which can be delayed due to rain washing out roads) and planes, I was always able to get everywhere I wanted to go. It seemed that the worst of the rainy season happened after we had already left. I am not certain that is typical but, I had no trouble with washed out roads or lack of access anywhere due to the weather.

## **2. Safety**

Personally, I had no issues with safety. One of the other interns had her purse stolen. However, simple things like wearing a purse with a strap that crosses over your shoulder and not wearing a purse at all at night worked for me. I was conscientious not to pull large cameras out of my bag at night or to carry bags that looked particularly trendy – for example, I often carried a backpack rather than a designer purse and even my purse was a very simple, non-designer brand as well. If I was leaving work late or going out late, I never carried my laptop either. You can leave your laptop at DC-Cam as there are people who live there and keep the building protected. It is very safe there.

Further, many Cambodian people – those I befriended with the smile trick – would keep an eye out for me. They would frequently comment if I was going out with a bag that was conspicuous or would remind me to wear a money belt at night that would be tucked inside the front of my pant line just behind my pant belt. Since I never had any trouble, I initially thought their concerns unfounded but later realized that it was probably in part because of all their help that I had such a positive experience.

## **3. Accommodations**

This ties in to safety very closely. You can choose an apartment that has twenty-four hour security or other places that have multiple layers of locked doors. I had friends who stayed in both kinds and none of them had problems with safety in their homes. I, however, went a different route and also had no security problems. The summer before I went to Cambodia, I did a study abroad and met a girl who would also be an intern in Cambodia with me. We talked about it and decided to live together. Others of the interns sent out emails before arriving and discussed sharing an apartment. This is helpful to save on rent as prices are going up around the city especially for short term rentals.

My friend and I arrived in Cambodia together and so initially stayed in the same guesthouse. We walked around looking in the areas that prior SU interns recommended that I look for housing and found that it was more expensive than we were hoping. We were finding that even a shared apartment, split between three or four others was going to cost about \$330 per person and I would anticipate those prices continuing to rise. Instead of getting an apartment, she and I decided to share what was basically a hotel room for the entirety of the summer! This is something I probably could not have done with just anyone. It was a very small room – similar to a dorm room in college – that had a TV, one small coffee table against the wall, two beds, a

very narrow walk space between them (one person could fit there at a time), and a private bathroom. It was also an air conditioned room. This cost \$10 per night.

After walking around looking at various places for a couple of days and not finding anything within our budget, we hired a tuk-tuk driver who took us to a great number of guest houses. These are basically hotels but are less fancy. Some of them were not very nice at all and had serious problems with mold and other funny smells. If you try to go the guest house route, spend a day looking around at a wide variety of them and look in various parts of the city to determine where would best fit your preferences. We stayed in the Okay Guesthouse and it was much better than just “ok.” They should rename! I highly recommend this place for its location, friendly staff, good food right in the common area on the main floor, the 24 hour security, and clean bug-free rooms. Talk to me if you are considering Cambodia so that I can give you a business card of theirs and sing its praises just to be sure you are convinced into at least staying your first couple of nights there.

#### **4. When you arrive**

You’ll get to the airport and will want to have small bills with you and a passport photo. If you forget the photo it is not a big deal but I think they will just charge two dollars (US currency) extra. You will get your entry visa – Anne will tell you about this too but you do not want the business visa but the “regular” one as DC-Cam can renew that one for you – and can head into the city. You will be able to take a tuk-tuk (a moped pulling a carriage sort of thing) or a standard taxi. The tuk-tuk should cost between nine dollars and twenty dollars. The taxi will charge more. They will ask for much more and haggling is expected and is not considered rude there! Though tipping is not required, if I liked the tuk-tuk driver, I tended to tip a dollar on longer trips like that going from the airport into the city.

Drivers do not really relate the city to maps. It makes telling someone where would like to go very difficult before you get to know the city yourself. Eventually, you will learn to direct people by telling them to turn here or there as you go. Determine the price of a trip before you get into the vehicle to avoid conflict afterwards (which works somehow despite the driver not always knowing where I asked to go). I made a practice of asking if they knew where a certain place was before getting in as well but they would often say yes though have no idea in reality.

For the first trip into the city, Anne will recommend the Golden Gate guesthouse. It is relatively near DC-Cam and is in a part of the city where there is a lot of food right outside the doors of the guesthouse. It is very popular with tourists. My roommate and I did not stay there as the driver knew of a different place that was comparable in price – his place charged \$15 per night while Golden Gate was \$12 per person I believe. It was easiest and the least stressful option to just let him take us to a place and we discussed that if we didn’t like it, he would take us to Golden Gate. His option was totally fine and he was extremely friendly and was our first Cambodian person to urge us to be safe about walking around at night alone and carrying a snatch-able bag. I would recommend Okay Guesthouse for your first night as they are very welcoming, there are food options near there as well, and it is a bit off of the primary tourist area. However, while getting your feet wet, it’s not all that bad to have things be easy by staying where more tourists do!

#### **Cultural Consciousness**

Cambodia is not a developed country and there are a variety of drawbacks that go along with that. Poverty is a serious issue in Cambodia. The disabled, children, and young mothers are often forced to beg and are exploited as beggars. Do not give money to children or disabled people who will beg from you. This is modern day slavery and being savvy in Cambodia means perhaps buying food that the child will eat with you or getting them a drink that you have them drink with you rather than letting them take something away. They will not see the benefit of what you give them unless you have them consume it there. And, many of the children are extremely proficient in English and seem to enjoy chatting. Use it as a time to learn about their country, schools, their families. It's good English practice for them and will give you an insight into the country.

It is generally not as clean as you may be accustomed to either. Though people sweep the streets, there is a good deal of trash by the end of the night especially in areas where people are eating and there are insects that go along with that. Cambodia deals with insects in a home differently than we do in America. In the U.S., you live as you want and if bugs come, you call an exterminator. In Cambodia, there are no window screens and you live in a way that does not attract bugs. Do not leave open food around – ants will find it. My jar of peanut butter survived the summer, my friend's jar of Nutella did not!! Keep food tightly sealed, in a refrigerator if possible. Just be mindful of it and it will not be a problem. Watch how the staff at DC-Cam do it and emulate that! They know all the tricks!

Get to know the staff. They are lovely people and are always willing to laugh and share about Cambodia. Youk requires that they know another language and many of them speak excellent English. Befriend them! Not only do they know a lot about the court, the Khmer Rouge, and Cambodia, they also have personal expertise that they bring to DC-Cam. Find out what they are doing and learn about their projects. They are wonderful.

### **Practical Pointers:**

- Office Hours are from 7:30-5 with a lunch break from 12-1:30.
- Dress is business casual – it is very hot so bring clothes that are breathable and washable. Women wear skirts to the knee or longer with a blouse or cotton shirt that has at least a small sleeve. Men wore pants and a polo or button down. You will not need a suit while there but if you will be going to court more frequently, you will want to dress up some for that and for meeting with the various court personnel.
- You will work primarily from your laptop so make sure it is in good order with everything backed up.
- It will rain LOTS but don't worry about an umbrella or rain jacket – it's too hot for a rain jacket and they sell poncho type things at just about every little stand.
- Be sure to be conscious of theft everywhere – hang on to your bags tightly while in a tuk-tuk or on a moped. Watch your bags while out or at restaurants. Be sure to lock up wherever you stay carefully.
- Areas to live in – I stayed between the Riverside area and DC-Cam so that walking to a very active area took about five minutes and walking to work took about ten minutes. Others live in BKK as well which is the area just behind (South) of DC-Cam.
- You can find any type of food, any type of groceries, etc that you might want. It is a very livable city. There are coffee shops and very accessible wifi everywhere. Eating is

relatively cheap. It can be as low as \$1.50 for a plate and it goes all the way up to very fancy French restaurants from there.

- You do not need to prepare much before you arrive but try to at least scan through some background information on the court and DC-Cam. You will have some time in the first week to get acquainted with everything.
- Anne prefers that interns stay for ten weeks but eight weeks is the minimum duration of the internship.