

# The Curious Tourist

Vietnam, Cambodia & Mekong Delta

December, 2014

We were curious about this part of the world. So we jumped at the opportunity to take this Uniworld cruise and land tour. As usual, Uniworld did not disappoint. Here are some photos and notes from our trip in no particular order. Some temple photos are included along the way but there are a lot more at the end, along with daily itineraries, menus, etc. We hope you enjoy ...

*Dave & Luelle Robinson*



Everything in this part of Southeast Asia depends on the Mekong River and Delta.

The River Orchid was our floating hotel for a week



The Angkor Wat Temple was built in the 12th century. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, it is considered one of the 7 wonders of the world.

Map of the trip  
Throughout the season the ship goes back and forth,  
first one direction, then reversing.



We started in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon. After two days we boarded our ship and began our journey on the Mekong River. We sailed up and down the Mekong around Phnom Penh, the capital, before driving by bus through the countryside to Siem Reap. Again we stayed in a 5 star hotel and visited several temples including the sites used in the movie, Lara Croft Tomb Raider.

We then flew to Hanoi and toured the famous Hanoi Hilton, home of John McCain after being shot down in the the Vietnam War. Finally we stayed an extra 3 days in Hong Kong on our way home.



Angelina Jolie in Tomb Raider Movie filmed here



# Transportation



It's amazing what can fit on a 100 cc motor bike.  
There are helmet laws in both countries we visited. They are flexibly enforced, however.  
About 50% of riders wore helmets. About 25% of passengers were helmeted.



There doesn't seem to be any size limit to what you can carry  
on a motor bike. Also no red flag required.



Going To Market ... Jackfruit, the world's largest fruit



Jackfruit and Watermelon. We watched the chef carve the watermelon in 20 minutes. Gonna sharpen up my knife and give it a try. Jackfruit tastes kind of like mango.



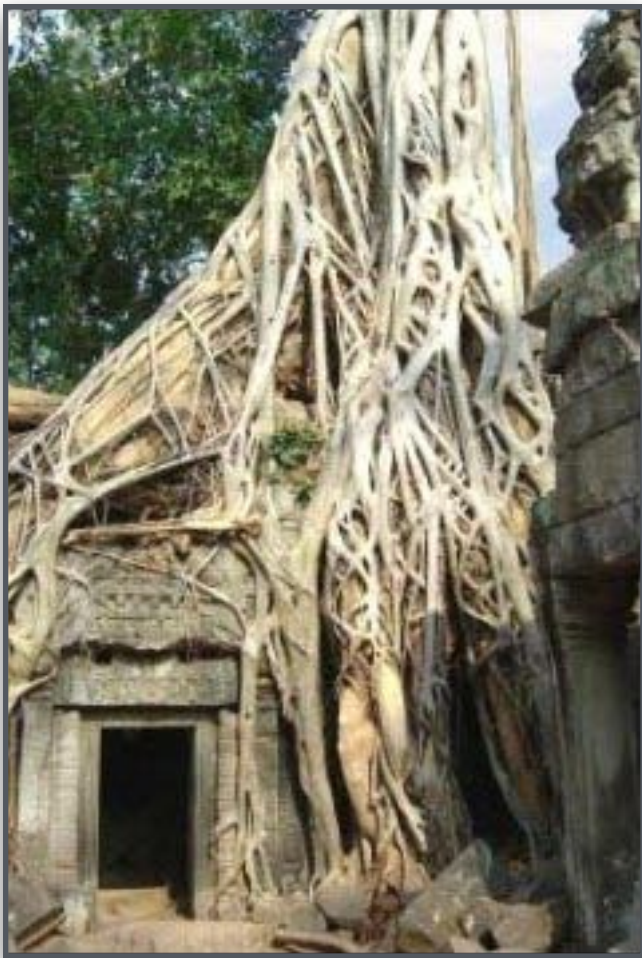
Those temple  
eating trees were  
awesome.



Another tree vs. rock competition.

With enough time, the trees  
always win.

The highest development in the  
plant world is a mature forest! ...  
and even temples can't stop the  
nature's progression toward  
mature forest.



Luelle, watch out!  
Really it's only a fig  
tree and totally safe.  
But a pretty big one  
for sure.



## Safe Money & Travel Tips

Things we've learned, some of it the hard way.

1. Cargo pants with closures on the pockets are a good idea. Eddie Bauer has them with velcro closures on the front two and a button on the wallet pocket.
2. Open purses or bags are a bad idea.
3. Never set a purse or bag down unattended, such as next to your chair at a restaurant. Best to keep it small and wrapped around your body.
4. Have photocopies of your passport in multiple locations. Also email a copy to yourself.
5. A small money bag safety pinned inside clothing is almost failsafe.
6. Pick pockets work in tight spaces. When it's really crowded, be really careful.
7. Beware of the map trick. Usually they work in teams. The foil will raise a map in your face asking you directions. The question confuses you, and the map obscures the hands of the other team member going for your wallet.

## Pick Pocket Alert

After having all our money and passport stolen in Barcelona, we thought we were pretty sensitized and aware of Pick Pocket schemes. But no! We discovered a new one. Right at the gates of the Confucian University in Hanoi... A team of two women, one "grandma" and a younger one supposedly the pregnant daughter for sympathy...(I'm convinced the baby bump was a pillow) Negotiations were happening at very close quarters. (first cautionary alert) Wallet open, fishing for correct bills. The women said something surprising, the opposite of what everyone else wanted. "No, no, You got dong money? We want dong. (Vietnam currency) Yes, you got dong, there! ...pointing to some receipts in the wallet. With the pointing, the fingers were actually in the wallet. I watched it happen twice. The exact same pitch. Fortunately we were late for our bus, closed out our negotiation and escaped with wallets intact



These are the two adapters that will make life easier on this cruise and land itinerary. This will handle your phone, camera, ipad, and computer re-charging because those are all dual voltage. You cannot plug a hair dryer or other devices in like this. For items with a motor you need an inverter which will change 220 to 110 volts. The ship or hotel "may" have one you can borrow.



Cambodia is about the same latitude as Nicaragua in Central America and St. Lucia in the Caribbean. So that means even the cold season is hot. We went in the end of December, just before Christmas, which is the coolest time, and also the dry season. It was still pretty warm ... I'd say about like Virginia in July. So short sleeves, hat and sun screen are in order. Later in the year it gets so hot that no cruises or tours are even scheduled. Our ship, the River Orchid, was a little over half full, which was another benefit, making this the best time of year for this itinerary. (December, January)



We actually spent Christmas Day in Hong Kong. Surprisingly, all these countries are all decked out for Christmas. Christmas music, Christmas trees everywhere, Santas everywhere and people saying Merry Christmas. (But didn't see any Baby Jesus's) It seems to be both marketing to the tourists and an intense curiosity about anything Western. In China the Christmas craze is so strong the government is cracking down on it and dis-allowing Christmas celebrations.



How  
monkeys  
learn to sit  
that way



I'll tell you what I'm thinking if you'll  
tell me what you're thinking.....



Family  
Grooming  
Time is  
Quality  
Time!

These monkeys  
roamed the grounds  
of one of the temples  
that we visited. We  
were warned not to  
get too close as they  
would want us to  
share our food and  
belongings.





Maybe 5 Star really means the number of Geckos per room? They prefer being very high on a wall or upside down on a ceiling.



Water Buffalo mud bathing and taking a stroll through town is apparently an everyday occurrence. They didn't bother this motorcyclist, who had places to go and people to see.





Docking along the Mekong

No dock required





# Fish Farming and Fishing Villages



## New Home and Fish Tank Under Construction

You can see the Bamboo pontoons for flotation. The framework of the fish enclosure is made of Ironwood or Rosewood. The bamboo must be replaced in 3 or 4 years as it begins to leak. The hardwoods are very resistant and will last 30 years under water. After submersion this tank will hold 70,000 fish. The home above will hold a family of 4 or 5.



## Upper class neighborhood on the river

Here are 3 neighbors ... all in the fish farming business and they all have about 70,000 fish under their houses. Notice the TV antennas and draped extension cords.

Every house  
had these  
orange ice  
chests.



The Ice Vendor  
delivering block ice  
to the local ice  
chests. Real  
refrigerators were  
almost nonexistent  
... being too  
expensive to buy  
and operate. But  
everyone had a  
smart phone and a  
small TV.





## Steps Toward Modernization



Views from the ship along the river bank.  
Tilling with a Chinese Garden Tractor and Spraying Insecticide.

Our guide said the bigger farms hire laborers to spray like this for \$10 per day. You can see the man is at least wearing gloves. But no respirator or mask. Breathing poison day after day will surely have consequences.



### New and Old

Metal siding, metal roofing, concrete pilings and a Solar panel to charge the battery and keep the TV receiving the 3 local channels. Styling indeed. The neighbor is more old school with thatch made of palm fronds for walls ... but he has the same TV antenna.



# Seen Along The River



We passed hundreds of rigs like this. The boat is used to transport the gas driven pump ... and hold the suction line out into the deeper water. The rig pumps water to fill rice paddies adjacent to the river.



Close up of the most popular engine on the river. Note the way the prop injects water into the tube which then circulates and cools the engine.

Minimum housing along the river but it works here at 10 N latitude, which is warm, even in the cool season.





# Seen Along The River



## Transplanting Rice.

The seeds are grown at high density to about this size right on the river bank. Then they are transplanted into the paddy with more room to grow.



The Elders are buried in their rice fields. It is a sign of respect and prestige ... how elaborate the headstones are.



Ancestor Worship continues in vegetable gardens on the outskirts of Hanoi.

Fried Crickets  
A Cambodian  
Delicacy

We didn't get  
to try any.  
(This photo  
was taken  
through the  
bus window)  
So, we'll have  
to go back to  
try this  
Cambodian  
delicacy.



This is a  
Cricket Trap.

They are  
drawn to the  
light at night.

Harvested and  
Roasted the  
next day

Served Fresh  
Daily



## Collecting and Selling Raw Palm Sugar



This Bamboo section is the equivalent of the Maple Syrup bucket for harvesting the sweet syrup

# Traditional Arts & Crafts



Artisans were trained and crafts offered in the local markets.









These two guys were temple fixtures. They were both over 90 ... and couldn't stop smiling. We found the Cambodian people among the happiest we've ever seen. Much happier in general than in the US or Europe.

Interesting.



Lots of Buddhas.  
Every town and village of any size had a temple or shrine.





The 5 star hotel at Siem Reap after the cruise. (The one with the 5 geckos and the Siam Crocodiles.)



The Crocs were in the hotel lobby behind a (small) fence. Guests could help feed daily at 1:00 pm. Chicken was their favorite menu item.

The dining was outstanding whether at the Hotel Restaurant, the special dinners arranged by Uniworld or the dining room on board the River Orchid.





The traditional Cambodian dancers who had performed for the royal court had mostly been killed during the Killing Fields time of Pol Pot. This new group is now carrying on the tradition for the royals as well as the tourists. The story is all in the hand movements.





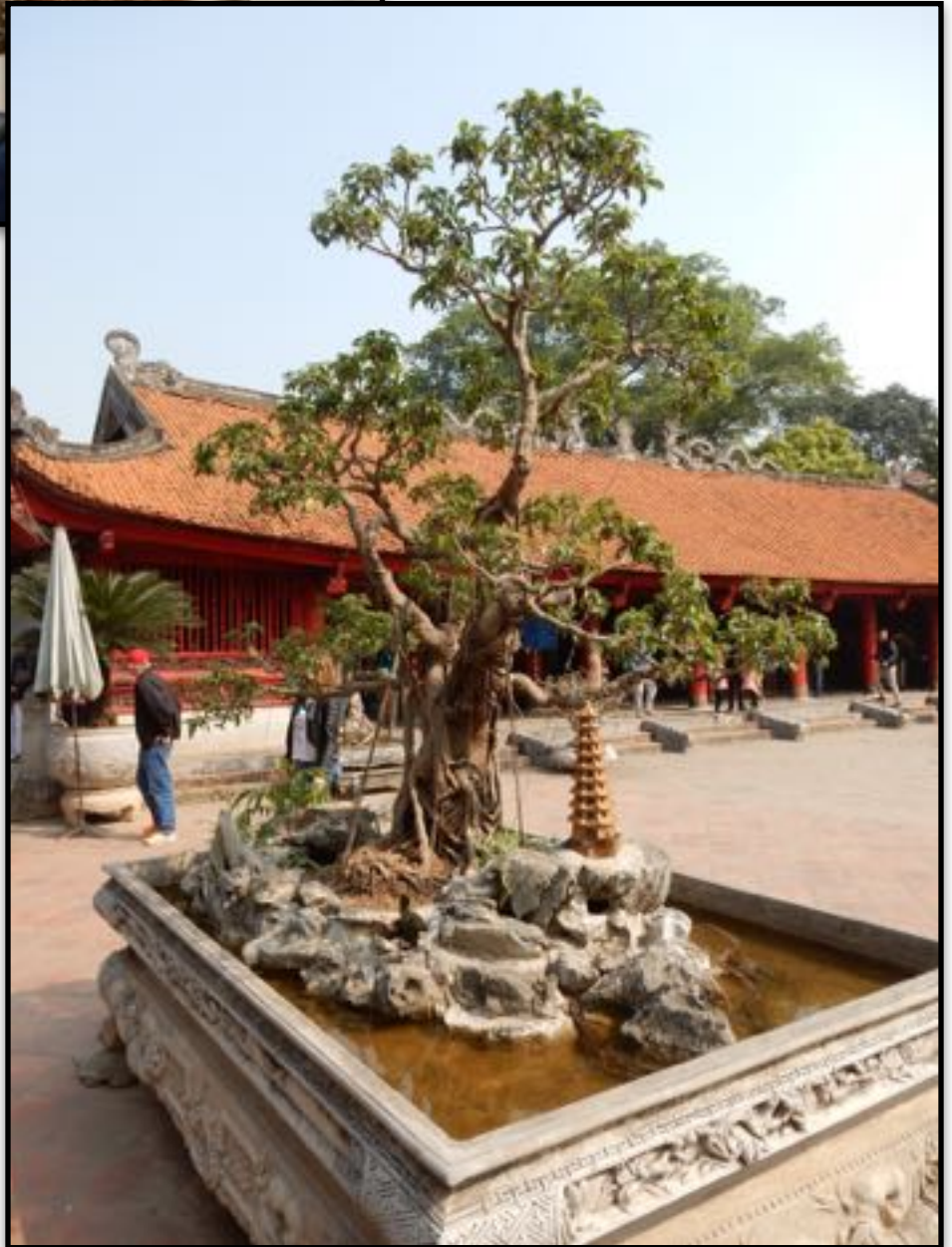
“Cyclos” are a left over transportation that was introduced in the 1930’s by the French, with some of the vehicles from that era still in service. They are trying to save the history and keep the cycles cycling.





Incense Burner

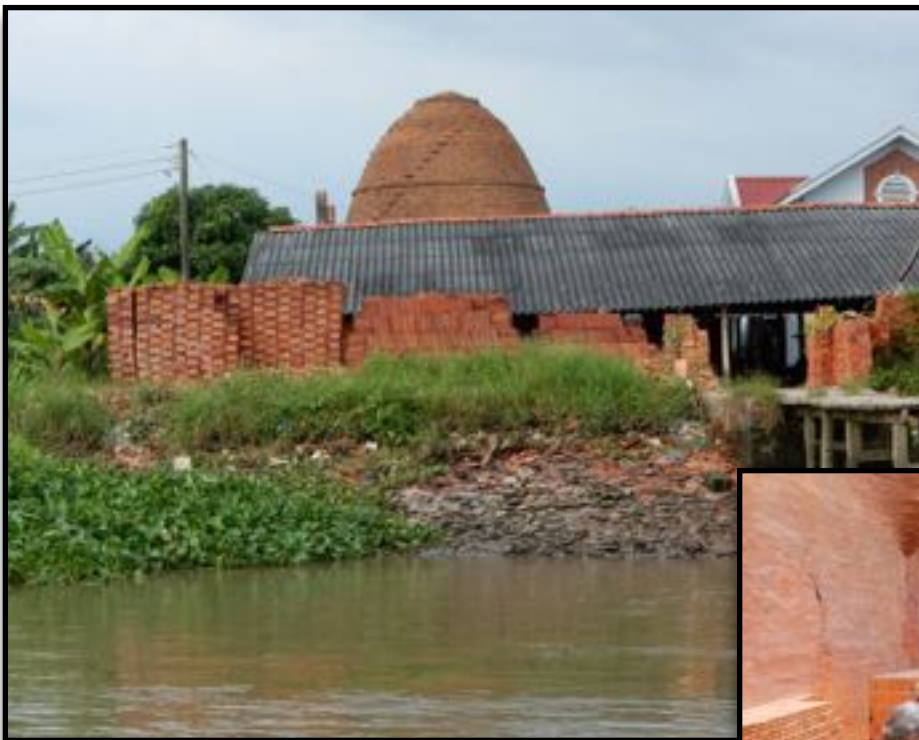
Bonsai Tree Sculpture.







Water Hyacinth is an imported species from South America which has become a staple crop in the Mekong Delta



Inside the brick kiln

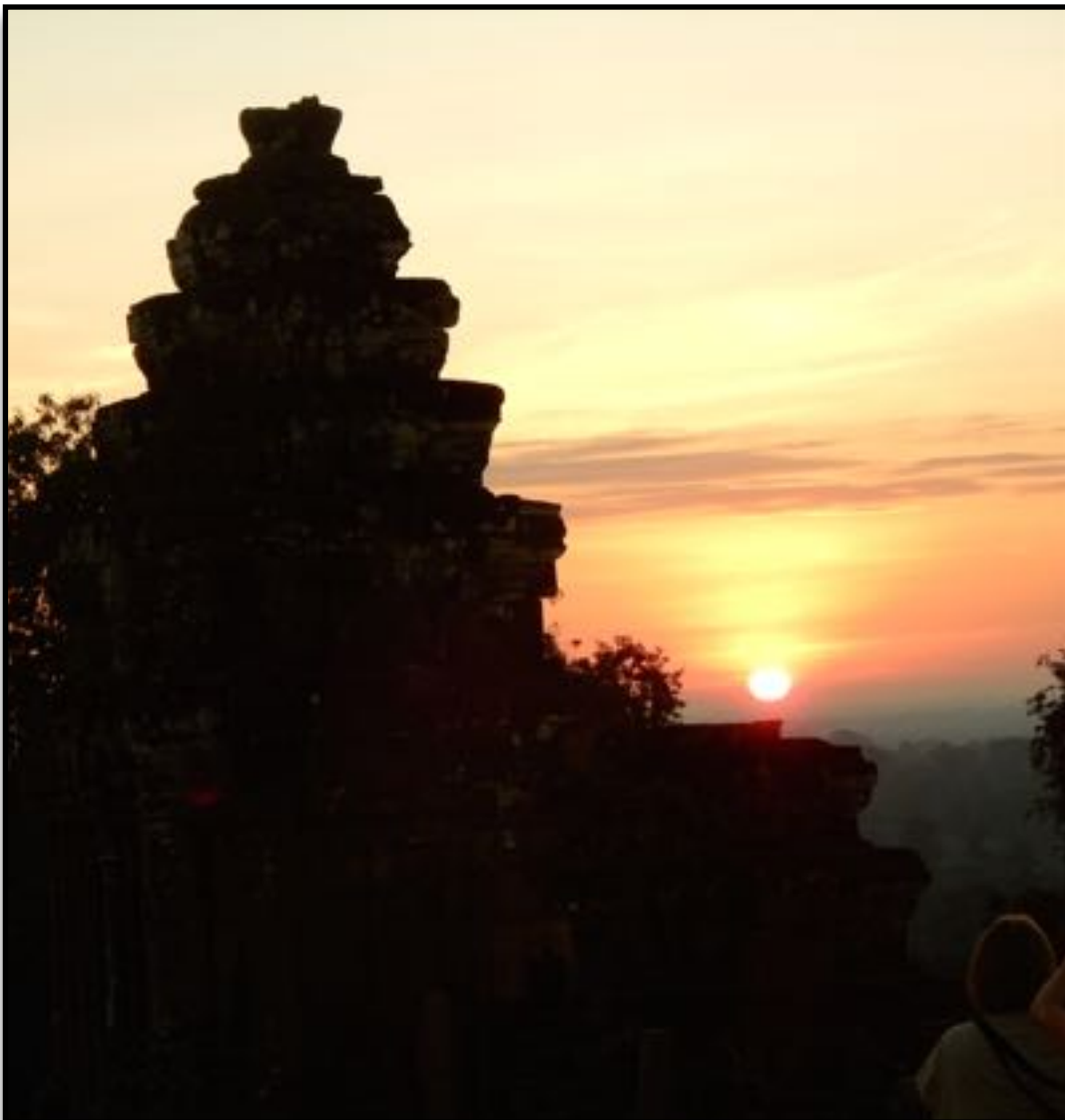


A tour of a brick kiln was one of the stops along the Mekong River





Working in the  
rice paddies



Sunrise at  
Angkor Wat is  
a popular  
tourist activity  
as well as a  
local tradition

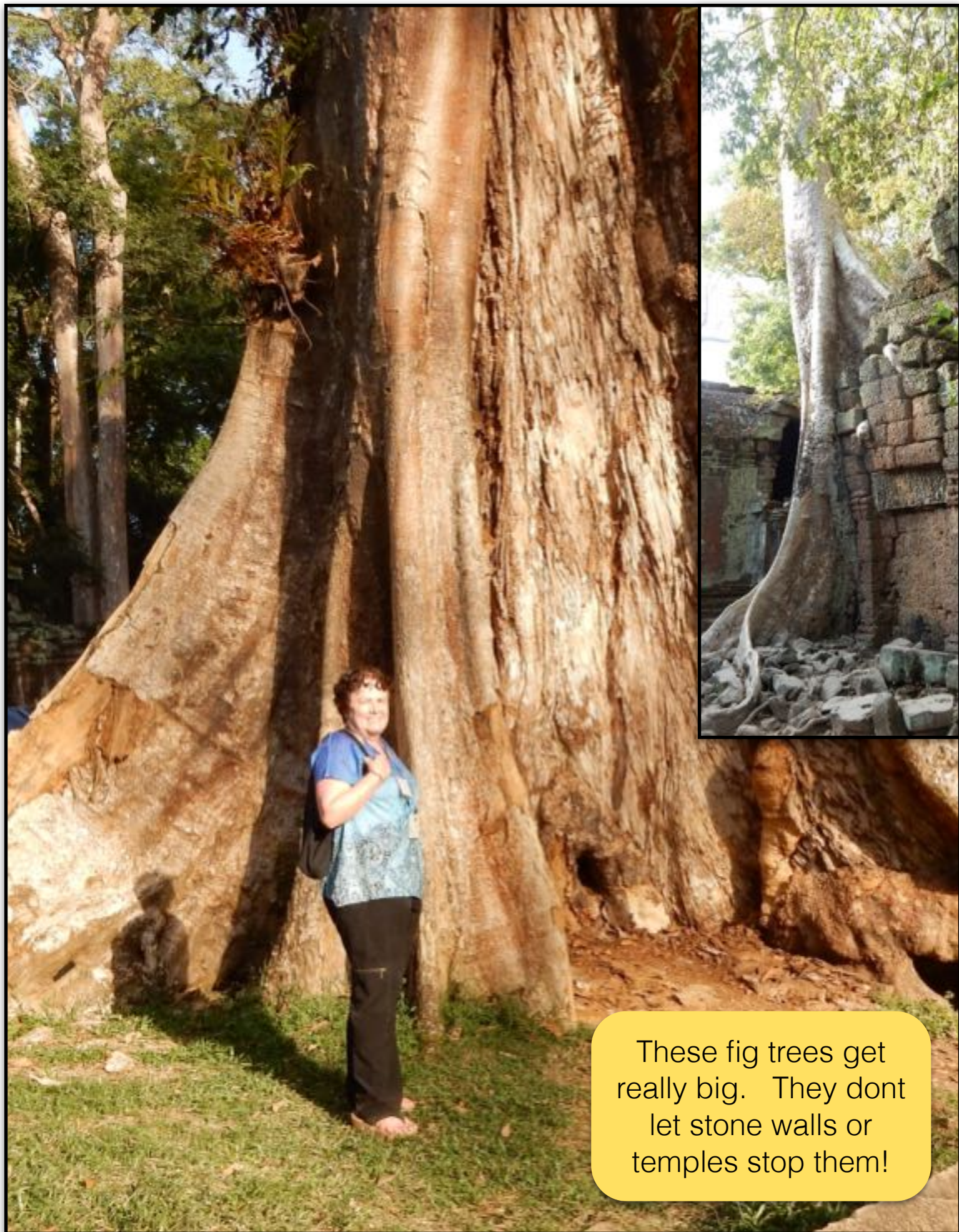


Angkor Wat with our guide, Chanta.



Chanta had been 10 years old when Pol Pot started the Killing Fields. He lost many family members and spent most of his teen years in refugee camps and the army. Obviously he had a lot of stories to share and was amazingly happy and grateful. We hope he gets a Visa and comes to visit us and so we can be his tour guide.





These fig trees get really big. They don't let stone walls or temples stop them!



My elephant was  
46 years old.  
They live to over  
100. The ride is  
pretty bumpy.

She enjoyed the  
extra breakfast  
which I had saved  
to share with her.





Luelle, are you sure  
you dont want to  
hold the snake?

No, that's OK,  
I'll just pet him.







We all ate meals together on board the ship with unassigned seating.

Daily we split into two groups for touring.

This is our Orchid group. People were from Canada, South Africa, and the US.







Each King would build a temple to show his greatness. The following King would start all over with his own temple. There are over 3000 of these temples spread throughout the jungles of Cambodia.

Following are several photos of the Temples around Siem Reap. Angkor Wat is the most famous but there are a few thousand throughout the jungles of Cambodia.

After that are some daily itineraries, menus etc.





















The Hanoi flower market runs all night long and was almost ready to close as we passed by on our way to the airport to fly home.