

ARCHITECTURE BATTAMBANG

Walking Map Central

History

Battambang City, with around 140,000 inhabitants, is the largest secondary city in Cambodia. Its name comes from the legend of Bat Dambong, the “Disappearing Stick”. Situated on the Sangker River, people have lived in wooden houses along its banks for centuries. When the province was associated with the Siamese (1795 to 1907), Battambang City had about 2,500 residents. By the end of the 19th century the number increased to around 100,000. An open-air market (today known as Psar Nath), numerous pagodas, a Chinese temple and rectangular fort with the palace of the Lord Governor dating to 1830 were landmarks of the city.

During the French protectorate the formerly dispersed settlement was transformed into a busy marketplace, urban agglomeration and administrative stronghold. The French introduced two urban development plans, including a grid pattern of streets, the construction of bridges and a railway linking Battambang to Phnom Penh.

After Cambodia’s independence Battambang City quintupled its area and became the industrial and commercial centre of the region. Several large infrastructure and public facilities were built under the state modernization program; including schools, university, sports centre, museum and exhibition hall, roads, airport and the extension of the railway line to Poipet.

Further Information

The Battambang Municipality, supported by the GIZ Land Rights Programme, has launched the initiative “Our City – Our Heritage” with the aim of preserving valuable heritage buildings with their original appearance to sustain the cultural identity and unique historic character of the city; the inner city area shown on this map is classified as a “Heritage Protection Area”. Khmer Architecture Tours promotes urban heritage in Cambodia, especially in Phnom Penh, and conducts tours on architecture and public-awareness projects.

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Urban Heritage

Battambang City has inherited a rich urban heritage with a great variety of historic architecture, representing different phases of the city’s history. The city center between Road #1 and Road #3 is characterized by a coherent ensemble of about 800 heritage buildings from the French protectorate and from the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (period after the country’s independence).

Outside of this area, outstanding heritage buildings, like the New Khmer Architecture of the Battambang University, French-Classical style villas along the river and traditional Khmer wooden houses can be found. Throughout the city beautiful Wats are expression of the city’s religious heritage. All these historic buildings and ensembles contribute to the city’s unique character and beauty.



Wat Pipetharam



Shop House Detail



Phsar Nath

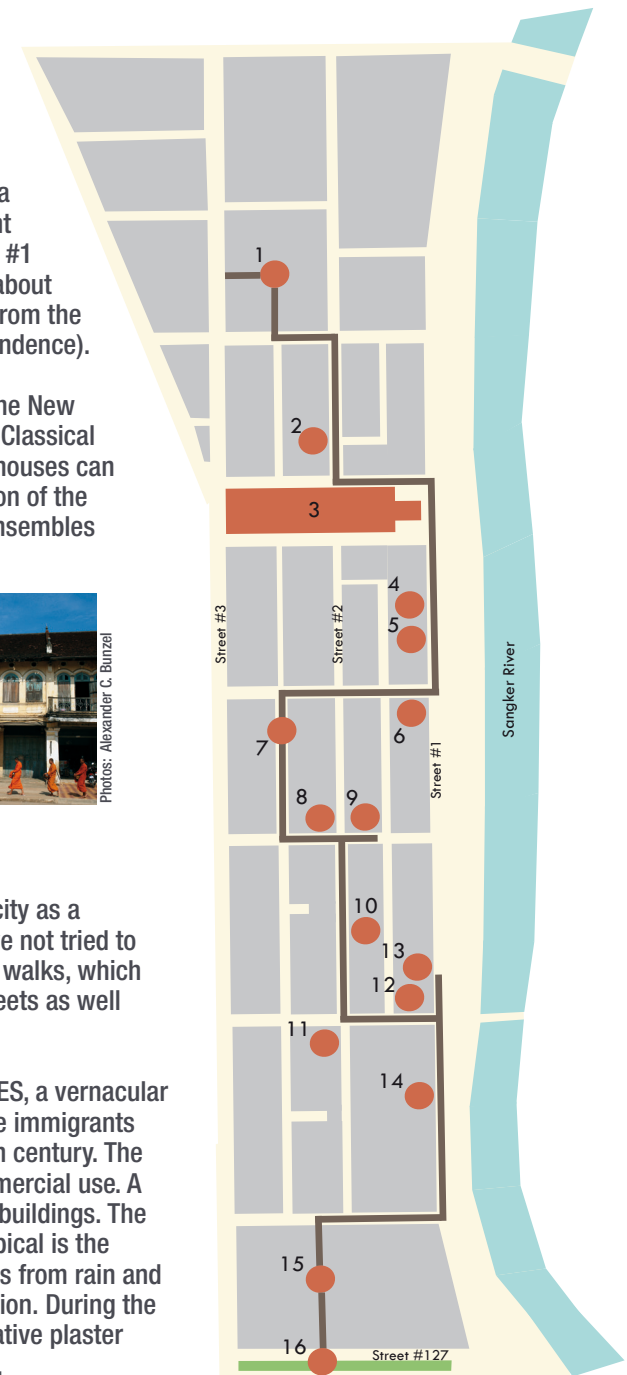


Photos: Alexander C. Bunzel

The buildings included on the map

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The inner city of Battambang is dominated by SHOPHOUSES, a vernacular type of building common in urban Southeast Asia. Chinese immigrants introduced the shophouse to Battambang in the early 20th century. The mostly two-story buildings combine residential with commercial use. A courtyard providing light and air separates front and rear buildings. The average plot size is 4-to-5 meters by 20-to-25 meters. Typical is the “five-foot-way,” a covered walkway protecting pedestrians from rain and sun. The façades show a variety of styles and ornamentation. During the French period they were representative and rich in decorative plaster ornaments, but much simpler during the Sangkum period.



1. Wat Pipetharam

According to the inscriptions on the main gate, which faces east in front of the Vihara, this wat was built in 1888. During this time the province was under Thai rule. It has been restored and was renovated in 1920, 1969 and 1993. Some architectural features, especially the roof of the Vihara and the decorations, show influences of Thai Buddhist architecture.

2. Building of the Cantonese Association

Dating approximately from the 1930s, the building was home to the Cantonese Association in Battambang and used as a Chinese school until the Lon Nol regime in the early 1970s. The open veranda at the backside used to be the tea kitchen for the school. The rear building on Road #2 1/2 dates from 1960 and was originally part of the school; the courtyard in between was used as a sports field. After 1980 the building became an orphanage. The façade -- especially the arched windows and the handrail on the first floor -- remain intact. The handrail on the top floor has writings in Chinese and French. Today it is privatized and used by different tenants.

3. Psar Nath

The Phsar (Khmer for “market”) is the main heritage landmark of the city, housing vendors selling all types of goods. The Art Deco building, planned by the same French engineers that built the Central Markets in Phnom Penh and Saigon, was constructed using reinforced concrete in 1936. The two halves of the building used to be divided by Road #2. The tip of the eastern part, which is now a restaurant, used to be the central bus station until the Khmer Rouge took power. Historically, the market has changed its name; today it is called either Phsar Thom or Phsar Nath.

4. Shophouses next to the Chinese Temple

This shophouse is typical for the Street #1; it contains a main two-story building and a smaller rear building with a courtyard in between. It is built from “Street-to-Street.” (between Streets #1 and #1 1/2). Characteristic elements are the arcade (five-foot-way), louvered shuttered windows, folding wooden shop doors, a pitched roof, columns and pilaster, arched windows with shutter and air ventilation above the front door. The balcony has some elaborate cast-iron works, showing the French influences in Indochinese shophouses. All five houses in a row form an ensemble, thanks perhaps to just one investor. The owners before the war emigrated to France; following the end of the Khmer Rouge regime these buildings were taken over by the Provincial Department of Fine Arts and Culture with one part used as a printing shop.

5. Chinese Temple / Chinese Spirit House

At approximately 150 years old, this building is the oldest in the conservation area. It is the only surviving of at least 3 Chinese temples, which existed in the 1960s. Its name, “Huai Bao Gu Miao,” means “The Felling of Protection Temple”. In former times, Chinese settlers used to come for prayer and offerings, asking for prosperity and luck. The building was renovated several times in the 1940s, 1960s, 1992 and 2007. After the Khmer Rouge, the temple was part of the Department of Cults and Information of Battambang and was handed over to the Chinese National Association of Cambodia in 1982. The association - located until 1992 inside the temple - initiated a foundation for the support and renovation of the temple and for the establishment of a school. Today the temple is under the management of the Khmer-Chinese Association of Battambang

6. Corner Building and Villa

The corner building was used as pawnshop until the Khmer Rouge period; from 1980s until early 1990s it accommodated the Provincial Radio Station. A Cambodian businessman restored and renovated the

abandoned building in 2008 and 2009.

The villa was constructed and used as a bank and, due to this function, was detached. During the Lon Nol regime it became residential and has been rented to various nongovernmental organizations since the early 1990. The façade combines a mixture of classical architectural elements and traditional Khmer ornaments. The rear buildings along Road #1 1/2 were demolished in 2009 to make space for car parking.

7. Street 2 1/2: Series of Shop Houses

The east side contains mostly shophouses from the colonial period in the early 20th century. Typical elements are rectangular columns, pitched roofs, brick walls. The shophouses on the west side are designed in 1960s and 70s, and have round columns, flat roofs and reinforced concrete structures. Thanks to the repetition of the same building type, open arcades and balconies, there is a homogenous streetscape, which is now mostly residential. Note the back lanes on both sides of the street.

8. Chinese School (opposite of White Rose Restaurant)

This is one of the three Chinese schools of Battambang, which survived the Khmer Rouge regime. The three distinctive buildings date from different periods. In early 2000, the central building replaced a Chinese temple. The Hokkien community used the school until the Lon Nol regime when discrimination against ethnic Chinese increased and the city defense unit fighting against the Khmer Rouge occupied the school. After 1980 it became a school for government officials. Today it is under the management of the Khmer-Chinese Association of Battambang and accommodates the biggest Chinese school in Battambang with 1300 students (in 2002).

9. Buffalo Alley

The name of this old path (“Kampung Krabey” in Khmer) derives from the farmers who used it to lead their buffalos to the river during the 19th and early 20th century. Today there are plenty of restaurants and street vendors. The Chinese noodle soup restaurant at the corner is famous for its fresh noodle dishes. On Street #1 1/2 note the small rear buildings (kitchens) of the main houses along Street #1. Note also the access to the railway station to the west. In 2007 the Sar Kheng Garden Bridge replaced the old Iron Bridge dating from 1917, whose foundations were built by the French using canons brought from England in 1837.

10. Battambang Cinema (on Street 2)

The cinema has seating for 500 people and was built in early 1970s. It is one of two still running today. The building also accommodates apartments on both sides. In 1974 the Khmer Rouge tossed a grenade into a crowded movie show and killed many people. During the 1980s the cinema displayed mainly Vietnamese and Russian movies. Today new Cambodian movies are the primary films shown. The building is owned by Provincial Department of Fine Arts.

11. School Pi Thnouv

The school used to be one of three Chinese schools in the city center, catering especially for the Teochew community. The oldest building is in the rear; the high buildings on both sides were added during the 1960s. The school got its new name “2 December” after 1979 in honor of the resistance movement fighting the Khmer Rouge, which was founded in December 2, 1978. It is now the biggest primary school in Battambang.

12. Apartment Building

This building was designed in the 1960s and is a typical example of corner buildings that introduced a bigger Phnom Penh-like scale of constructions to Battambang in the 1950s and 1960s. Probably

designed for offices, this building is abandoned today, but partly used for classical performing arts classes. An example of New Khmer Architecture it is characterized by a double façade (decorative screen walls) providing shade and a roof terrace. A central staircase and outlying corridors provide the access to the rooms.

13. Sangker Cinema and Battambang Warehouse

The cinema was built during the 1960s and 70s, and was closed during the Khmer Rouge period. Today it is used as a workshop of the Department of Industry. Prince Sihanouk inaugurated the warehouse in May 1965, which belongs to the union of cooperatives of Battambang. It has enforced concrete structure, which was partly demolished in 2008.

14. Department of Land Management

This representative French colonial villa was used during the 50s and 60s by the forestry unit. After the Khmer Rouge period the building's use changed periodically, housing a maternity clinic, the Department of Fine Arts and Culture and finally, since 1999, the Provincial Department of Land Management, Urban Planning, Construction and Cadastres.

15. Wat Damrey Sor

Construction of this wat (whose name translates as “White Elephant”) was initiated by one of the wives of the Thai Lord Governor Choom named Ing. Therefore design of the main vihara includes elements of Thai Buddhist architecture. Built in 1904, the vihara features fine wooden decorations on pediments and lime plaster carvings surrounding the outer walls, depicting scenes from the Ramayana literary epic. Two buildings on each side of the main axis east of the main vihara were demolished; one housed elephant stables. The compound used to be accessed from the river in the east, but it is blocked today by the Provincial Museum. In 1907, when the provinces Battambang, Sishophon and Siem Reap were returned to Cambodia, the Lord Governor and his family fled to Thailand and settled in Prachin Buri Province. There he built a wat following the form of Wat Damrey Sor and named it Wat Kaewpichit.

16. Former canal south of Wat Damrey Sor

Today's garden south of Wat Damrey Sor used to be a canal named “O Ta Kam.” It was connected to the north canal named “Prek Moha Tep.” Both were part of a drainage system. A wooden bridge used to cross the “O Ta Kam” canal near the present day post office. Between 1953 and 1970 the canal was filled up and transformed into a small park and broad avenue. A sewage and drainage system was installed instead to prevent flooding.

Acknowledgements

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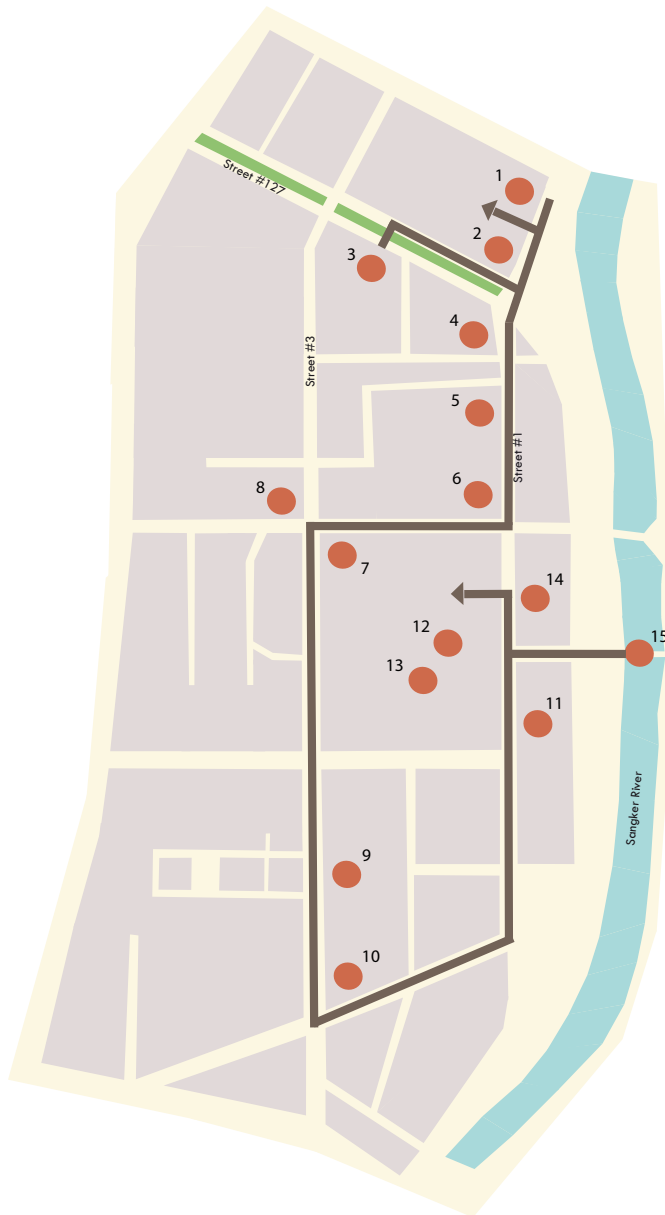
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Walking Map South



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Outside of this area, outstanding heritage buildings, like the New Khmer Architecture of the Battambang University, French-Classical style villas along the river and traditional Khmer wooden houses can be found. Throughout the city beautiful Wats are expression of the city’s religious heritage. All these historic buildings and ensembles contribute to the city’s unique character and beauty.



Provincial Museum



Stupa Wat Kamphaeng

Photos: Alexander C. Bunzel

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Most of the area of this Walking Map was the location of a fort called “Kampaeng”. Constructed under Thai rule in 1837 it was 480 by 720 meters large. The “Lord Governor” lived inside with his wives, female dancers, 56 elephants and horses; no other men were allowed inside the inner fort. It has been demolished in 1910 with the realization of the first French city development plan. Under the French protectorate until today the area is used mainly for administration purposes: e.g. provincial hall, provincial court...

1. Exhibition Hall

This building has been designed for traveling exhibitions during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, its present use is for exhibitions. It was inaugurated in 1961 and is one of the few exhibition halls throughout resisting time and destruction. The building’s architect is Yieng (full name is unknown), who worked within the Department of Public Works in Battambang and died during the Khmer Rouge. This centre and the Provincial Museum next to it are part of the urban development along the riverside in central Battambang.

The building’s shape is irregular and the whole structure made of wood. It contains elements of traditional Cambodian architecture, like an introverted space with a cooling lotus pond, a well-ventilated cloister and a gallery. Furthermore typical elements of the 60s are featured in the outside with rough stonewalls, reinforced concrete for the portico.

2. Provincial Museum

This building is another design of the architect Yieng and was inaugurated in 1968. The building is built in a T-shape. Similar to the Exhibition Hall it combines traditional elements of Cambodian architecture like the gabled roof with Khmer motifs in the pediments with modern elements like concrete structure. Many artifacts had disappeared during the war.

3. Boxing Stadium (Sports Ground)

Erected during the 1960s, the compound consists of service building, an open-air bar and a (recently dismantled) wooden gallery for audiences. Olympic Rings can be found everywhere as decorative elements. The stadium was popular for Khmer boxing until 2007.

4. Post Office

Built by the French administration between 1907 and 1926, the Post Office has been renovated first during the Lon Nol regime and again in 2007. Some main architectural elements, like roof and windows, have been modified. The building has been used as a post office and telecommunication since the beginning.

5. Electricity Company and Department of Water Authority

The Electricite du Cambodge and the Water Authority have been established under the French administration, which started to develop the city from 1907 onwards. The development of technical infrastructure like water and energy supply was essential to meet the demands of the growing city. The location works as a buffer between the administration complex and the residential and commercial city centre to the north. The compound of the Electricity Authority houses a warehouse erected prior to 1925. It facilitated a Soviet-made Diesel generator that fueled the city’s

need for energy until 2008 when Thailand started to supply power to Cambodia.

A water tower from 1920s is still intact. In the past the supply covered only the city center, but in order to meet present demands, the capacity of the station has been enlarged in 2005 under the financial support from China. The station’s water comes from the Sangker River.

6. House for the Vice Governor of Battambang

The villa was erected for the family of the first Vice Governor of Battambang. It has a distinctive architectural style, merging French-colonial style and traditional Khmer elements. Particularly the concrete sculptures supporting the roof are very uncommon for residential buildings. Those “Kenor” is a mythical female dancer with a body half human and half bird, normally only used for Wats and public buildings as decoration. The building is still public property and today illegally occupied by multiple families, which have filled the compound with their shelters.

7. Provincial Court

Built during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum by the same local architect Mr. Yieng who built the Provincial Museum of Battambang, the building features a representative style merging modern and classical Khmer architecture elements. The French Court used to stand on the opposite corner of the street, in the same block as the prison.

8. Former Prison Location

The French built a prison in between 1907 and 1926, using parts of the north wall of the old Kampaeng Fort. It was continuously used as a prison for ordinary criminals until the Khmer Rouge time. The buildings were demolished in 2007, using the compound for the construction of a new commercial area, which can be seen today.

9. Wat Kamphaeng and Stupa of 1840

The original Wat was built before 1837 by Mrs. Tim, first wife of Governor Kathathan Nhonh and mother of the last “Lord Governor” Chhum. Its original location was the present-day South Primary School, but in order to extend the street #3 to the south, the Wat was relocated around 1926 to the present position, replacing eight elephant shelters for 56 elephants of the Lord Governor.

The stupa on the school compound is the last remainder of the old Wat. It is said that the stupa, built in 1840, contains the ashes of one of Buddha’s disciples named Preah Arahanta Theat.

10. Kamphaeng High School

Both school buildings are in their original shape, an architecture influenced by the French-colonial style. The school is one out of four similar primary schools erected by the French administration throughout the city.

11. Sport Centre (Au Circle Sportif de Battambang)

The Sports Centre consists of the Sports’ Club and the attached swimming pool. Originally named “Preah Sihanouk Swimming-Pool” the Sports Centre was designed by local architect Lu Pen Hap and replaced the French Officers’ Casino. King Norodom Sihanouk himself inaugurated the centre on 27th May 1965. The swimming-pool was only the third of its kind that was built in Cambodia. Reduced in its length in recent years it used to have dimensions that meet Olympic specifications. Notice the original diving board being located far from the pool today! The open terrace above the gallery has been filled with a massage club recently.

12. Sala Khaet

Under Thai influence from 1795 to 1907, the family of Chavfea Baen ruled over the province for six generations. In 1905, the last “Lord Governor” of Battambang hired Italian architects from Bangkok to construct a new residence inside his fort (“Kamphaeng”). Leaving in 1907, when France insisted the province to be returned to Cambodia, all his houses were sold to the French authority, including the residence, which he never had lived in. Back in Thailand he lived in the town of Prachin Buri, where he built another (identical!) mansion and hired even the same craftsman.

Sala Khaet accommodated later on the “Resident Supérieur Française”, but the fort was destroyed in 1911 with a small part of the north wall remaining. A nearby Wat and school still carry the name “Kamphaeng”. The mansion underwent several restorations and lost some of its main original architectural features like the roof pediment, windows and doors. In 1990s the main gate was destroyed and replaced by a new gate in the style of Banteay Srey, initiated by the former Governor of Battambang who used to be a Governor of Siem Reap Province. Currently the gate is under restoration.

13. Royal Residence (Royal Bungalow)

The Royal Bungalow on the compound of the Provincial Residence was built in the 1960s by famous Cambodian architect Vann Molyvann. Its architectural design is a fusion of traditional Khmer architecture and contemporary features (“New Khmer Architecture”). It accommodates the Royal Family whenever they visit Battambang. His Majesty, King of Cambodia Norodom Sihamoni, was last seen there in 2007.

14. Department of Tourism

The Tourism Department is located in a colonial-style villa built prior 1926. Concerning the building’s history it might have been the office of the “Inspecteur de la Garde Indochine” according to a map from 1926. As part of the climate adaption an interior gallery surrounds the office rooms and cools against tropical heat. The main road crossing the administrative quarter parallel to the river was named Avenue Sisowath during the French occupation.

15. First Concrete Bridge

Built in 1916 by the French administration; the bridge emphasizes the main axis from the east of Battambang to the Provincial Hall. We can see the French road kilometer stone (with the inscription “0 kilometre a Battambang”) and the traditional pair of lions on the west bank of the river. The bridge was damaged by crossing military trucks in 1997 and is only accessible for motorbikes and pedestrians since that time.

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