

Situations to Consider when Visiting Cambodia

Cambodia is not America...or anywhere in the West. I know it seems obvious but many times we can go somewhere and view everything we see through our western lenses. This simply won't work. It is somewhat like watching a 3-D movie without the glasses on...or reading your favorite book while looking through binoculars the wrong way. When visiting Cambodia, it is imperative that you practice viewing everything through someone else's eyes. You cannot view what you see through your lenses. Granted there are some things that are absolutely, intrinsically wrong but most of what you see and experience must be seen through the eyes and history of the indigenous lives you are here to serve. Here are a few things you may experience here that will necessitate you shifting your chair:

Can you shift your chair when:

- You are stopped about midway back in the straight lane at a red light. When the light turns green, you end up missing your light because 2 cars from the left turn lane merge into your lane and it takes forever. Road rage is nearly non-existent here. Traffic is crazy but for the most part accepted as a part of life.
- You are sitting on a chair at a small table reading and waiting for your moto to get washed. As you are waiting, a Khmai man comes and sits right on the other side of the table (just a few feet away) and stares at you. Unapologetically. You make eye contact with him and smile and he still doesn't look away. This goes on for 5 minutes. Especially for westerners, you are a sight to behold. You will be stared at.
- You see several men stopped on the side of the street going to the bathroom. May be in the countryside or right in the city...or even right in a market. This is so commonplace.
- There is a group of naked children playing in the dirty rain water, some looking like they are bathing in it or even drinking it. Many Cambodian children rarely get the chance to bathe, let alone swim. A heavy rain is a logical time for them to take advantage of it.
- A very young child (as young as 3-years-old) is crossing a very busy street by herself, cars and large trucks going around either side of her. This is very common.
- A mom seems passed out or at the very least sound asleep as her young child plays near traffic and among crowds of strangers, unsupervised.
- 2 men or 2 women walking down the street hand in hand or with their arms around each other. In Asia, it is very acceptable culturally for same gender friends to show physical affection.
- A father driving his moto quickly down the street with a 4-year-old sitting in front of him and his wife holding his new infant on back. The kicker is, the dad is the only one wearing a helmet. Cambodian law only requires the driver to wear a helmet.

- Young school age children working hard during a time when they should be in school. Many kids have to work to help support their families.