



## CAMBODIA

Cambodia is bordered by Vietnam on the east and south, Thailand on the north and west, and Laos to the north. Rich, fertile plains touch the humid jungle, and great rivers such as the Mekong—one of the world’s most important waterways—cross the covered hills. An interchange of ideas flowed between Cambodia and other cultures of the Southeast Asian mainland, but India contributed a strong, unifying influence through language, literature, religion, and politics.

Cambodian culture was at its height from the seventh through the mid-fifteenth centuries under the Khmer rulers. Among them was King Jayavarman II (reigned 802–850), who established the Khmer ruler as a “god-king” or *devaraja*, the deity who protected the kingdom. King Suryavarman II (reigned 1113–ca. 1150) extended the Khmer empire through military conquests and built numerous temples, including the monumental Hindu temple complex Angkor Wat.

From the mid-fifteenth century onward, neighboring countries continually attacked and invaded Cambodia. In 1845 it was subjected to joint Vietnamese and Thai protection, while French colonial interests in the region began in the 1860s. Cambodia gained independence in 1953, which was followed by years of civil war, communist rule, and invasion by the Vietnamese. National elections in 1998 established political stability.