

Lotos Rallye 2020: An amazing self-drive jeep tour through Cambodia.

Every year since its conception over 7 years ago, we have strived to develop and enhance the Lotos Rallye itinerary; looking for new routes, accommodation, restaurants and experiences for our guests. For the Lotos Rallye 2020 we have travelled the extra mile and created, what we believe, **is the best Lotos Rallye jeep tour ever**. New roads have opened up, new places have been added and unique, new hotels have been included. For a new visitor to Cambodia, this tour will provide the most exhilarating way to experience this uniquely special country, and even those guests have been lucky enough to join in the past, will discover completely new experiences and a new side to Cambodia on this tour.

The LOTOS-RALLYE is not designed to be driven at speed, but is about experiencing the wonderful landscape of Cambodia with its cultural and historic buildings and amazingly friendly people. Tours of temples, local markets and other special places of interest are all included in this wonderful journey, but we have taken special care each day to ensure that the routing will take you on the path less travelled giving you a truly personal and unique jeep travel experience.

As a participant of LOTOS-RALLYE your tour includes the all-round carefree package including:

- Accommodation in some of Cambodia's most special and unique hotels (except in Veal Veng)
- Entry fees to all places of interest and German/English-speaking guides during tours, All excursions
- All meals and complete catering during the rally – breakfast lunch and dinner as well as a daily snack box (except lunch on the first and last day of the tour)
- Free flow drinks during lunch and dinner (soft drinks, house wine, beer, coffee/tea, water)
- 12 days of jeep usage, all petrol costs, all vehicle maintenance and insurance and well as a support car which travels with the group
- Complete set of event documents: road book, routing, rally signs, start numbers, trophy and souvenir photo album.

Day 1: Phnom Penh: Arrival day

Welcome to the magical land of Cambodia – the Kingdom of Wonder. Our team will meet you at the airport and transfer you directly to your hotel. Here you can check in and enjoy the hotels facilities getting used to your new environment before starting what will be a truly memorable journey. At 6.00pm you will meet our team in the hotel, where you will receive a full briefing and be given all necessary information you will need. Our team will also be happy to answer any further questions. After dinner you can take a good rest in preparation for the first full day of your tour.

Day 2: Phnom Penh

The bustling capital of Phnom Penh, located at the intersection of three rivers, the Bassac, Tonle Sap and the mighty Mekong, is the heartbeat of the nation. Its French colonial past is evident through the city, no more so than in the old French quarter. This morning, in a tuk-tuk, equipped with a digital tablet & headphones for each guest, you can step back in time with Phnom Penh Heritage Tour, discovering the fascinating colonial heritage of the city. The tour includes 19 stops around the city with 22 historic sites such as the old post office, the China House and Le Hotel Royal. The video guide reveals the story of each place showing films, old photos, descriptions & historical anecdotes, and also gives you the privilege of virtually entering some buildings not accessible to the public.

After lunch, you can choose which attraction to go to. One choice is to visit the architecturally stunning Royal Palace, including the famous Silver Pagoda, where you can marvel at the sheer beauty of the buildings and murals. Alternatively you can visit either the Tuol Sleng Museum, a former Khmer Rouge prison and torture center, or The Killing Fields of Choeng Ek, the final resting place for tens of thousands of Cambodians killed during the Khmer Rouge regime. While not the most uplifting sites, they provide what, for many visitors to Cambodia, is an essential part of understanding the country and its troubled past and each has a very interesting and informative audio guide.

At 4.30pm, you will all meet up again and transfer you to pier. You will enjoy a sunset boat cruise watching the sun go down over the Phnom Penh skyline from the middle of the Mekong River. A beautiful and fitting end to your first full day.

Day 3: Phnom Penh – Kep

Leaving the hustle and bustle of the capital behind us, you will drive over a mix of dirt and paved roads towards Cambodia's southern coast. Continuing your way through small towns and villages you will arrive at the provincial town of Takeo where lunch will be served. As we get closer to the southern coast, pepper plantations appear and the paddy fields are a deeper green and even more lush. From the jeeps you have plenty of opportunity to observe the authentic Cambodian countryside lifestyle as people plough the fields with oxen and water buffalo rest in the shade. After about 3 hours you will arrive at the coastal village of Kep. This is where Asia meets France by the seaside. A favorite holiday spot for the French, Kep still shows signs of its affluent past as old colonial buildings and villas litter the small village. With a little imagination you can picture life the way it used to be. After a long day you will be able to relax in the comfort of your hotel and re-energize yourself.

Day 4: Kep

Today you will visit the local Trapeang Sankea community. Here a special project designed to bring the mangrove back to the coast. A boat will take you into the mangroves where you can help keep this project going! You will be given a baby mangrove plant from us which you can

plant on the Kampot coastline helping to return this vital ecosystem to the area. You can also take a short walk through a specially laid out footpath allowing you to immerse yourself in the mangroves. After this exciting activity you will drive small roads to the beautiful Secret Lake. We will serve lunch here surrounded by a stunning mountain view. In the afternoon we'll visit the famous Kampot Pepper plantation. Kampot's unique geography and climate work in harmony to provide the perfect environment to grow the best pepper in the world. You'll learn everything about red, white and black pepper. There is also a school on the farm and you will get an explanation about how the school system in Cambodia works. A nice idea is to prepare a sort mini-lesson or talk to explain, for example, where you come from and maybe teach the students some new English words. You will be rewarded by the smile on the faces of the fantastic kids. You will be impressed by the beauty of the countryside around Kep as you travel back into the village. For dinner you will have the opportunity to experience the best sunset location in Cambodia overlooking the ocean as you sample the delicious menu at the Kep Sailing Club

Day 5: Kep – Kirirom

After breakfast, you continue your jeep experience by travelling the dirt roads through the peaceful countryside to Kirirom. The name 'Kirirom' means 'Mountain of Joy' and was given to it by the King of Cambodia. The ancient name of the place was 'Phnom Vorvong Sorvong', named for the main two hills connected with the Cambodian popular legend about two heroic princely brothers, Vorvong and Sorvong. The National Park, an impressive high altitude plateau, is known for its unique high elevation pine forest, which provides the source for many streams which feed the surrounding Kampong Speu province. Once home to the Indochinese tiger, this park is also the home to many endangered species of animals such as pleated gibbon and sun bear. After experiencing the park's unique beauty, you will then have the unique experience of staying in the safari bungalow tents at vKirirom Pine resort in the heart of the forest. Here you can fall asleep in comfort with the sounds of nature surrounding you.

Day 6: Kirirom – Koh Kong

Leaving the rolling hills of Kirirom behind you, the picturesque drive will take you cross country toward the wilds of Koh Kong province. After crossing four rivers, you will arrive in the afternoon in Koh Kong. Here you will spend days exploring the pristine waters and forests at the foot of the Kravanh and Cardamom Mountains. The more energetic among you can hike a little, or simply cool off in the clear waters if you prefer. In the evenings you will have the truly special experience to escape to paradise, at one of the most luxurious and exclusive of Cambodia hotels, 4 Rivers Floating Lodge where you can relax in a serene floating bungalow on the Tatai River. The floating tents at the tranquil, overwater hotel, are the first of their kind, and a must-see destination, for anyone who loves to fully immerse themselves in nature, while still maintaining the ease and comfort of a luxury vacation.

Day 7: Koh Kong

In the previous Lotos Rallye we only stayed at the 4 Rivers Floating Lodge for one night, but it is such a unique and special place that this year we decided to add one more night in order to fully the tranquility of this beautiful accommodation.

Your day, depending on the tide, starts at around 10 a.m. with a 45-minute boat ride past Tatai village. Turning on to a tributary you head into the heart of the Cardamom jungle to the far-off sounds of exotic birds and its secretive wildlife. As you travel further away from your accommodation you will begin to hear the rush of water powerfully falling over rocks getting stronger as you travel down the river. Within minutes you are at journey's end, gazing down into the turbulent waters of the falls, seeing the true power of the falls as it drops six meters to the rocks below.

Soon it is time for lunch, after maybe a few moments hydro-massage and a refreshing drink as you find some shade for a picnic and open your senses to the sights and sounds of the jungle. We will also arrange to transport some kayaks so the adventurous among you can take to the water and experience truly special view of the falls.

After leaving the falls, depending of the season, we might stop at the mouth of a small river where you can paddle your kayak to a traditional Cambodian farm; you will see rice fields and some fruit trees and a firsthand experience of how agriculture works in the countryside. Upon returning, you will be able to relax, eat and enjoy your special lodgings for one more night.

Day 8: Koh Kong – Veal Veng

Today will provide you with some of the most adventurous, small road jeep driving of this year's Lotos Rallye. Early in the morning you will begin what will be a fascinating journey to Veal Veng, taking you on a very scenic and adventurous drive into the enchanting Cardamom Mountains. The road is a new addition to the Lotos Rallye, travelling alongside the Thai border. Special permission had to be sought to drive on this military road, and its special status means we will have a ride with virtually no traffic.

This Cardamon Mountain range runs 300 km from the north-west to the south-east and 200 km from east to west spanning 4.4 million hectares of rainforest. It is one of Southeast Asia's largest remaining rainforests and is home to a number of species of endangered wildlife such as elephants, sun bears, crocodiles, gibbons and the stunning clouded leopard. The extensive jungle and hills are also home to around 25,000 people, many of whom are ethnic minorities. Frequent rain makes it one of the wettest areas of Cambodia, but produces luxurious vegetation giving the whole area a fresh and vibrant feeling. Its sheer seclusion means you will take one of the few roads that penetrate into this beautiful mountain range. A challenging drive, but one that will offer you some of the most breathtaking scenery. Upon reaching your accommodation in Veal Veng you are sure to have experiences a jeep drive not easily forgotten.

Day 9: Veal Veng – Pailin

Another exciting day of driving awaits you today, beginning the day driving hard on country, dirt roads which are impossible to use during the rainy season. You will pass through remote villages, along hillsides and into valleys where you will need to traverse small rivers as you head north towards Pailin. After a fascinating and challenging dirt drive, we will finally hit a new tarmac road north of the small town of Samlot. This new road is much smoother allowing you to sit back and relax for the last part of the journey as you drive into the capital city of the border province of Pailin. After arriving you will be able look back from the foot of the Cardamom Mountains and take in the sweeping views of the green rolling hills and wild jungle you have just spent the last two days travelling through before taking well deserved nourishment and rest at your hotel.

Day 10: Pailin – Battambang

Having had a couple of long, exhausting but rewarding days, you will have time to lie-in a little. After a relaxing breakfast, you will drive on small, quiet roads and pass a huge water reservoir en route to the lovely colonial town of Battambang. The province is also famous for its stunning scenery and beautiful dirt roads that will make your make exploration fun and interesting. We will arrive in the afternoon giving you plenty of time to wander around taking in much of the colonial style grandeur that still remains. Smaller than Phnom Penh, but still a bustling center, walking around Battambang will give you a genuine and fascinating insight into daily Cambodian city life.

In the evening we will visit Phare the Circus. Phare, The Cambodian Circus tells uniquely Cambodian tales using modern circus arts and high energy music, touching on themes strong in Cambodian tradition, ethos and spirit. The performances mix theatre, music, dance, acrobatics, juggling, aerial acts, fire and contortion with an explosion of virtuosity and sensitivity. During the hour-long shows, the Phare performers share their emotions and excitement, blowing the audience away with their integrity and power.

Day 11: Battambang

We will start our tour at 8am in the morning with a ride on the famous bamboo train. The bamboo train is a 2.5m x 4m raft-like device that is made from bamboo for local villagers to transport their goods. There is really no other way to describe it other than “simple but inspired”. There is only one track used for both directions so if you see someone coming in the other direction the drivers you will have to decide which train has the lightest load. The train with the lighter load or fewer passengers must be ready for a little exercise as you will have to unload the goods and people and remove the train from the track to let the other train go by. After this unique experience you will explore the north of Battambang and drive up to the historic 11th century Ek Phnom temple. On the way we will stop to visit the villagers and see how they produce local products such as fish paste, sticky rice, rice wine, rice papers, noodles, and clay pots which are commonly used in the countryside to collect rainwater. You will also get a chance to learn more about the Khmer Rouge when you visit the Well of Shadows, taking a monument to honor the people killed during the war. Near the monument

you will get the opportunity to visit the hundreds of Fruit Bats that hang on trees producing a loud and interesting noise. During lunch you will have the opportunity for a cool and refreshing swim.

After lunch the tuk-tuk ride traverses through small villages and crisscrosses between rice fields towards Phnom Sompov Mountain. The mountain is about 140 meters high and has more than 800 steps to reach the top. You will avoid climbing up all the steps by taking a motorbike up the first part of the mountain to visit the temples, shrines, and killing caves used during the Khmer Rouge period. Once at the top you will also have a beautiful view over all of Battambang and enjoy a truly vast and beautiful scenery. You will end your journey before sunset by walking down the mountain steps and visiting the “bat army” – thousands of bats flying out of their caves in the mountain side at dusk. Afterwards you will return to your hotel to eat, rest and reflect on what has been a full and fascinating tour.

Day 12: Battambang – Siem Reap

Today you will leave Battambang and head to Siem Reap, the gateway to the famous temples of Angkor Wat. Despite being a hub, Siem Reap still retains a village feeling with many things within walking distance. Your journey will begin with a drive along the river, which will lead you to your first stop in a small village. Here you will see the fascinating process of how the locals make rice paper.

Your second stop of the day will be at Blue Beret Hill, named after the peacekeepers who were part of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). Established in February 1992 and operating into the following year, UNTAC's aim was to restore peace after years of troubles, and help Cambodia to hold free and fair elections. At the time, a large portion of the troops used this hill as their base camp, at that time only access by helicopter and after they left, the name of the hill remained.

Before arriving in Siem Reap you will make one final stop at a local silk farm. Cambodian silk is world renowned as one of the best. Here you will learn the painstaking and labor intensive process that goes into making one of the most luxurious fabrics in the world. The final leg of your trip will take you into pretty town of Siem Reap where you can get some rest before what is certainly going to be a fabulous and memorable day tomorrow.

Day 13: Siem Reap

This morning you will depart by jeep for the magnificent UNESCO world heritage site, the ancient temples of Angkor Wat. We have scouted and researched some back roads to the temples which still exist, taking you away from the tuk-tuk and busses, giving you a much more beautiful and relaxing trip to the temples. With a little imagination, today's journey will allow you to truly picture the lost temples the way they have lain for thousands of years. An English speaking guide will take you through the historical park where you visit majestic structures to take in the grandeur of the ancient Kingdom. Most of the temples originate from the 12th century and house some of the most anticipated bas reliefs and beautiful sculptures such as garudas and apsara dancers.

First you will visit the talismanic temple of Angkor Wat, the biggest of all the temples, which has survived the sands of time and remained in marvelous condition. Here you will be able to marvel at its dominating towers and sheer presence, as you take your rime walking around inside. Next you will continue to Angkor Thom, with the spectacular Bayon temple. Here 54 intricate and visually stunning four-headed Buddha statues will eye you as you walk round this quite magnificently preserved temple, truly one of the most impressive sights of the temple complex. Lunch will be taken near the manmade lake of East Baray, designed and constructed to supply the temple complex with its water. After lunch and a short rest to recharge, you will visit the Ta Phrom temple. Made famous by the box office hit film “Tomb Raider” with Angelina Jolie, the temples iconic trees have slowly taken over with their gigantic roots embracing the walls and creating a visually striking and unique setting, providing a stunning finish to your day of “templing”.

Tonight you will have a delicious farewell dinner with all of your fellow travelers. Here you can share memories, not only of today’s great experience, but your favorite stories and reminiscences of the past, truly memorable week.

Day 14: Siem Reap – Departure

Sadly, all good things come to an end, and this year’s Lotos Rallye is, unfortunately, no exception. Today is time to say goodbye to Cambodia, so enjoy the taxi ride to the airport, and have a final good look at the wonderful country you have enjoyed for the past 14 days. We are sure you have had an amazing adventure here, which will live long in your memory. We hope that you will come back very soon, and allow us to show you more of what Cambodia has to offer. Bon voyage!