

# Resort town's awakening

Siem Reap's leisure tourism boom is stimulating interest among planners of corporate meetings and incentives, writes **Marissa Carruthers**

**S**iem Reap's growing collection of quality tourism products, activities and services is triggering Cambodian inbound specialists to tap into the business events potential of the destination.

That, coupled with an intensifying corporate desire to seek out new destinations away from the traditional options of Thailand and Indonesia, are helping to plant Siem Reap on the corporate incentive map.

Steve Lidgley, general manager of Travel Asia a la Carte, said 2018's figures are on track to see a 20 per cent year-on-year improvement in business events performance, noting a "surprise" increase during the recent high season.

He added the majority of business comes from MNCs based out of Singapore, Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur organising regional events and incentive trips for mostly Asian participants.

He believes 2019 will see a peak in interest from China as Cambodia becomes an increasingly popular destination. Said Lidgley: "I also expect to see more growth from existing Asian markets looking for new destinations."

David Baron, Angkor Golf Resort's director of golf, has seen a 15 per



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**Steve Lidgley,**  
General manager,  
Travel Asia a la Carte

cent hike in corporate bookings in 2018, with the 18-hole stand-alone golf course mainly serving groups from Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Japan. An increase in enquiries is coming from Thailand.

The temples remain Siem Reap's top draw, with many planners seeking to incorporate a visit to the historic structures into their agenda.

However, more innovative temple experiences are being crafted, including boat trips on Angkorian ponds, picnics at remote jungle temples, and exclusive dining experiences overlooking ancient monuments.

Sala Kdei is an elegant traditional wooden house that sits on the banks of the Sra Srang reservoir at Angkor.

Jason Blackwell, director of marketing and sales, said the venue is increasingly catering to corporate groups of up to 150 pax seeking private dinners that feature traditional *apsara* shows, shadow puppet performances, and demonstrations of Khmer martial art *bokator*.

Siem Reap's abundance of natural beauty and increasingly improving accessibility are also driving more creative itineraries.

Examples include private classes with performers at Phare, the Cambodian Circus, Vespa tours, candlelit dinners in the middle of paddies and new venues for cookery classes, such as the top-class kitchen at Mahob Farm that caters for groups of up to 30 in the heart of rural Siem Reap.

Adrien Dennhardt, partner and managing director of Inspiration Cambodia, said the development of several five-star hotels on the coast of Sihanoukville has also helped bolster corporate incentive interest in

**Below: Angkor Wat temple complex, Siem Reap**



## TALKING NUMBERS

**1,149,336**

The number of arrivals at Siem Reap International Airport, as of July 2018. This represents a 10.5 per cent year-on-year increase

**225**

The number of hotels Siem Reap will have by end-2018, according to the Ministry of Tourism, of which 20 are classified as five-star

**15,000**

The total hotel room count in Siem Reap by end-2018, according to figures from the Ministry of Tourism

By Nido Hueb/shutterstock



From top: Plan a traditional performance for events hosted at Sala Kdei; Angkor Golf Resort

Siem Reap, as he can now work on cross-country agendas.

He said: "It has helped us to work on more attractive itineraries with nice accommodation across the country because once you confirm Cambodia as a destination, visiting Angkor is the number one request."

Cambodia's competitive costs are also stimulating growth.

Pascal Tadin, general manager at Sofitel Angkor Phokeethra Golf & Spa Resort, said: "We see strong performance from the corporate incentive market due to attractive value compared with neighbouring countries. Siem Reap offers modern meeting facilities minutes from a world-heritage site. This provides delegates a truly unique experience while on corporate incentive trips."

The resort, which was the first in Siem Reap to organise exclusive dinners at the temples accompanied by *apsara* shows, is gearing up to open an additional ballroom-inspired events space for mid-size groups.

However, challenges remain if Siem Reap is to reach its full potential. Ashley Lai, general manager of Courtyard by Marriott Siem Reap Resort – which opened in January 2018 – and is actively targeting corporate groups, said more direct flights are essential for the market to grow.

Lidgley noted Siem Reap is still los-

## REVIEW CENTRAL

# Courtyard by Marriott Siem Reap

By Marissa Carruthers

The Courtyard by Marriott brand made its Cambodian debut with the opening of Courtyard by Marriott Siem Reap in January 2018. The 233-key property is a welcome addition to Siem Reap's mounting business event offerings, boasting a range of activities and facilities for event planners seeking a chic and contemporary setting that pays testament to its Cambodian home, coupled with excellent service.

### Rooms

I stayed in a deluxe room with a balcony overlooking the resort's large swimming pool. Upgraded options include the executive room, and courtyard and presidential suites. The room was spacious and light, furnished with a corner work space with a desk and chair, and a 43-inch flatscreen TV.

### MICE facilities

It is clear that Courtyard by Marriott Siem Reap has heavily invested in its business events facilities, presenting more than 850m<sup>2</sup> of meeting space spread across seven function rooms.

Its 410m<sup>2</sup> ballroom – said to be Siem Reap's only ballroom with natural light, thanks to floor-to-ceiling windows – has a five-metre high ceiling complete with stunning crystal chandeliers. It is equipped with state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment and flatscreen TVs. Planners will appreciate that use of the hotel's event spaces comes with support from a full in-house events team.

An additional five function rooms – or Think Spaces – can accommodate up to 460 guests. Boasting modern designs,

the flexible spaces can be adapted to planners' requirements.

The resort's Upper Deck rooftop bar also provides a great spot for private events, affording panoramic views that take in iconic Angkor Wat.

### Other facilities

A range of F&B outlets run throughout the property, with Lok Lak being the main restaurant. A spa and fitness centre are onsite. Trips, tours and activities, including an in-house cookery class, can be organised by the resort's team.

### Service

Warm and welcoming.

**Number of rooms** 233

### Contact

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Website: [marriott.com/hotels/travel/repcy-courtyard-siem-reap-resort/](http://marriott.com/hotels/travel/repcy-courtyard-siem-reap-resort/)



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ing out on business to other destinations, including Bangkok, because of the lack of indoor activities and restaurants with high capacity.

He said: "There are precious few restaurants with capacity for 100 pax or more with audiovisual facilities in Siem Reap."

Dennhardt called for further

improvements to roads and cleaner private and public areas, while pointing out that Siem Reap faces rising competition from emerging destinations, such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar, as well as established options like Vietnam which has waived visas for citizens of several European countries.