

Cambodia



Background

Cambodia is a country on the Indochinese mainland of Southeast Asia. Cambodia is largely a land of plains and great rivers and lies amid important overland and river trade routes linking China to India and Southeast Asia. The influences of many Asian cultures, alongside those of France and the United States, can be seen in the capital, Phnom Penh, one of a handful of urban centres in the largely rural country.

Between 1975 and 1979 the country was devastated by the reign of the Khmer Rouge, a rural communist guerrilla movement. During the Khmer Rouge's period of power, at least 1.5 million Cambodians were killed or died, a monumental tragedy from which the country still suffers.

During the period following the Khmer Rouge and some clashes between rival groups, Cambodia began the process of recovery under the Vietnam-backed regime of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979-89), and in the 1990s it regained political autonomy, moved to re-establish a constitutional government, and elections.

While the Cambodian economy has steadily improved, Cambodia remains on the list of developing countries. Although Cambodia is undergoing significant urbanisation, most of its citizens continue to live in rural areas and experience poverty. With some improvement in the economy the country seems to be living by the words of the Cambodian proverb, *"Fear not the future, weep not for the past."*

Marist Links

Cambodia's recent history cried out for support from the international community. Volunteers came from around the world to work in refugee camps on the Thai border during the period of the Khmer Rouge and the civil war that continued afterwards. This included Marist Brothers like Terry Heinrich, Brian Etherington and others. After the Paris agreement and Cambodians began to return to their homes, there was need for this support to continue and Marists came to Cambodia to see how to best serve these

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| National Identity | Kingdom of Cambodia |
| Capital | Phnom Penh |
| Languages | Khmer |
| Population | 16.95 million (2021) |
| Time Zone | UTC+07:00 (ICT) |
| Main Religions | Buddhism |
| Motto | Nation, Religion, King |
| Arrival of Marists | 1998 |
| Number of Marist Brothers | 2 |
| Number of Marist Brothers Communities and location | 1 - LaValla School |
| Number of Marist Schools and location | 1 - LaValla School, Takhmao |

traumatised people. After a period of discernment searching for those in greatest need, Terry Heinrich and other brothers (Claudius, Badior, Paul etc) began the LaValla school for physically disabled children and youth in 1998 in Phnom Penh. The school moved to its current location in 2000. Next year it celebrates 25 years of care for these children from poor, mostly rural families throughout Cambodia.

Community

Two Brothers comprise the current community at the LaValla School in Takhmao. The Brothers here are involved in Administration, especially in support of the finances of the projects and also with the Board of Marist Solidarity Cambodia. The brother's house is situated on the campus of the LaValla School.

Marist Life and Mission Groups

Marist life here is intrinsic to the LaValla Project. The staff are predominantly Buddhist and are Khmer speakers. There is some English spoken, but not fluently. So, Marist life here does not follow the same pattern as in locations with a larger Catholic population. That said, the staff and students join with the Brothers in celebrating Marist feasts and local celebrations with a Christian/Buddhist prayer service.

School Ministry

LaValla School is an accelerated primary school program to provide an opportunity for students to complete a primary education in a shorter period than the government schools. Primary students in government schools only attend for half a day. At LaValla School the students have classes from 8.00am to 4.00pm. When the students have finished grade 6 at LaValla School, they have the opportunity to go to the government high school in Takhmao and live in the LaValla Village Hostel adjacent to the LaValla School. The project also supports around 70 disabled young people living with their families and attending their local rural school.

