CAMBODIA’S TOURISM RECORDS SHARP 43% DROP IN INTERNATIONAL ARRIVALS



Cambodia has seen some of the sharpest drops in its tourism industry with the country receiving approximately 2.46 million international tourists between January to the end of September 2026, down 43.7% from 4.37 million in the same period last year. This means the country has lost approximately 1.9 million international tourists in just 9 months.

The source of tourists of Cambodia's tourism has also changed with Vietnam now overtaking China to become Cambodia's top source of tourists. With Vietnam bringing in 651,486 tourists and China bringing in 643,314. However, this is a very small margin with just a difference of around 8,172 tourists. **Both countries have seen a sharp decline in tourists with Vietnam seeing a 28% decline and China seeing a 27.6% decline.** The United States was third with 140,276 tourists, suffering a smaller decline of 5.6%.

Tourism Minister Huot Hak said the drop in tourism was mainly due to the border issues with Thailand, negative press around internet scamming networks and global conflicts causing increased travel costs. This means hotels, tour guides, restaurants, transport and local communities are all suffering. This is not just a general drop in tourism in Southeast Asia but Cambodia has suffered due to security, transport and image issues.

Decline throughout the Year

There has been a steady decline in Cambodia's tourism throughout the first three quarters. As seen in the data below, Cambodia lost around 44.8% of its international tourists in the first quarter of 2026 with around 1.04 million tourists. The number of tourists dropped to around 292,000 in April, a 48.3% drop. The third quarter saw a 29.7% decline with 712,000 tourists. In the summer months, July saw around 246,000 tourists, August saw 255,000 and September saw 211,000. This means there was a decline of 35.4% in September.

Overall, Cambodia saw around 5.57 million tourists in 2025 with nearly US$3.87 billion in tourism revenue. We cannot compare this to the data for 2026 yet but even after just 9 months we can see the industry needs to change to compensate for the large drop in international tourists. This will also affect how long tourists stay and how much they spend.

Border Closure with Thailand Drives Much of the Loss

The largest factor has been the drop in tourists from Thailand. According to official data, there was a 94.7% drop in tourists from Thailand. In the first nine months of 2025, 978,826 tourists came from Thailand but only 52,114 came in the same period in 2026. This means almost half of Cambodia's international tourists have come from Thailand.

As Cambodia and Thailand are closely linked with many tourists travelling by land between them, the prolonged border closure and tensions have caused issues. According to the Asian Development Bank, Cambodia's economic outlook has worsened due to the geopolitical issues and the border closure. Although there has been an increase in air tourists, this cannot compensate for the large

number of land tourists that have been affected.

Vietnam overtakes China as the Main Source Market

Although Vietnam has overtaken China as Cambodia's most popular source of tourists, this does not mean there has been an increase. In the first half of 2026, China was still the most popular source of tourists. The visa waiver for Chinese nationals that was trialed from 15 June to 15 October 2026 has not had enough time to show its effect in the September data. Vietnam still sees many tourists due to them being close by and having good transport links but there is no sign of an increase.

Scam Networks Damage Perceptions of Safety

Another factor mentioned by Minister Huot Hak was negative press around internet scamming networks. A report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in February 2026 showed there were issues around human trafficking, forced labor and major human rights violations relating to scam networks in parts of Southeast Asia. Although this is an issue throughout the region it will affect some areas more than others. However, tourists will be influenced by how safe they feel the country is. Many tourists will base their opinion on what they see in the media. Experts note that to get confidence back, there will need to be ongoing work to combat criminal networks.

Angkor Suffers

Cambodia's main cultural site has also suffered. The Angkor Archaeological Park saw 510,528 foreign ticket holders between January to September 2026. This is a 27.61% drop from last year. This means ticket sales have dropped by 25.9% to just over US$24.2 million. Angkor has a large impact on the tourism industry in Siem Reap Province with many tourists coming to stay in hotels, using tour guides, transport and restaurants. However, the drop in tourists will affect the heritage and local economy. Authorities have emphasized the importance of keeping the quality of the site.

Domestic Tourism

However, domestic tourism has increased. The first nine months of 2026 saw around 27.2 million domestic tourists. This is a 46% increase from last year. This is the number of visits and cannot be directly compared to the number of international tourists. Although domestic tourists do help restaurants, transport and local attractions, they often do not spend the same as international tourists.

The Ministry of Tourism is encouraging more collaboration between the public and private sectors. More promotion is being done in areas other than Siem Reap such as coastal areas like Koh Rong, the Mekong region and the Northeast. To attract tourists looking for nature, culture and community based holidays, there will need to be reliable transport, quality services and investments to benefit local populations.

Outlook Hinges on Confidence and Open Borders

Cambodia has not done as well as neighboring Vietnam which saw around 17.68 million international tourists in the first nine months of 2026, an increase of 14.5%. This shows that tourism in Southeast Asia is not consistent.

To improve Cambodia's tourism industry, they need to provide predictable and safe travel. This means opening up the land borders with Thailand, ongoing work to combat criminal networks

and new air links. Key factors will be how long tourists are staying, total tourism revenue and how busy local service providers are. The data from January to September is a serious warning but will not be the final verdict for 2026. This will depend on future data to see if the industry can pick up.

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