

MONEY



\$US is the currency of pretty much all of tourist Cambodia. Everything is priced and paid in \$US. Unless you are traveling to remote places where few tourists go, you will never have any real need for exchanging money into Cambodian riel (which by the way are no good for exchange outside the county). Siem Reap and Phnom Penh have lots of ATM machines which dispense \$US. (I am not sure of the situation in places like Kep, Kampot, Sihanoukville, etc in terms of ATM numbers and availability.)

The bills have to be good quality, meaning no tears at all and not even tiny bits of missing corners. Some wrinkling is okay if the rest of the bill is okay. Otherwise you can have difficulty having the bill accepted.

You will pay for virtually everything in \$s and almost always get your change in \$s unless the change has some part under \$1, then you get riel at a fixed exchange rate of \$1 = R4,000 (for example, \$2.50 in change will usually be 2 x \$1 plus R2,000). You can use those riel for tips (or keep as souvenirs) and if and when you have enough riel you can apply them as part of paying for something in \$US plus riel.

When I go for a couple of weeks I usually take about \$20 - \$30 in \$1 bills if the exchange agency or bank at home has good quality \$1s. Then I take maybe 20 x \$5; 20 x \$10 and 10 x \$20 with some \$50s for hotels if I want to be paying that in cash. That is my starter package. When I need more money I just use one of the very many local ATM machines which dispense \$US. As always when traveling to far-off countries it is a good idea to let your bank know where you will be going so the use of your bank card in a 'funny' country doesn't cause your bank to block your card for fear of fraud.

If you withdraw a large amount of money from an ATM and get too many large bills then go immediately to the counter in the bank office where you just used the ATM. Show them your receipt and they will usually break some of the larger bills for you without charge. In general, it is advisable to always use an ATM that is inside or attached to a bank office and to do it during business hours.

It seems that every bank in Cambodia is now charging an ATM withdrawal fee that can be in the range of \$4 - \$6 per transaction. Apparently the golden goose of ATM fees was too alluring to resist any longer.

When it comes to credit cards, many places accept them (larger hotels, some smaller ones, larger restaurants, some smaller ones, fine boutiques and some other shops) and you should assume every place will charge 3.5% - 5% for using a credit card in order to recover their merchant fees (nice surprise if they don't as I experienced this year at one hotel).

Don't forget that many tuk tuk drivers, especially drivers you pick up for short one-way trips around town (back and forth to hotel in the evenings for example) may not have a lot of change since they barely make any money at all in general. So sometimes paying for a \$2 or \$3 tuk tuk ride from town to your hotel or vice versa with a \$20, a \$10 (or very occasionally even a \$5) could sometimes be a problem in terms of getting change. If you know you will be needing that kind of a tuk tuk ride try and have an appropriate number of singles or at least a \$5. If the driver has difficulty giving you change he is not trying to rip you off (the driver will probably run around to other drivers if available looking for change). He is simply that poor and without any work on that day. If in doubt, ask the driver before getting in if he will have change for whatever smallest bill you have if it is more than \$5.