



## SUGGESTED READING LIST FOR CAMBODIA

### **At First They Killed My Father – Loung Ung**

A heart-wrenching historical autobiography that recounts the brutality of war with vivid detail. A story of political oppression in Cambodia, it is all the more striking and intense as it is told from the perspective of a child, one who is thrust into situations that she doesn't understand, as she is only five years old when the terror begins. Loung Ung made many difficult journeys during her Cambodian youth, starting with being evacuated from her hometown of Phnom Penh. More meaningful were the journeys of self, which led her from a life as the child of a large and privileged family to that of an orphan and work camp laborer. From the deaths of her parents and sisters, we get a glimpse of the power that family relationships have in our lives. From her growing knowledge of the regime that has caused her to suffer, we learn of the vast gulf that often exists between a government's intentions and its actions, between words and deeds.

### **Never Fall Down - Patricia McCormick**

This National Book Award nominee from two-time finalist Patricia McCormick is the unforgettable story of Arn Chorn-Pond, who defied the odds to survive the Cambodian genocide of 1975-1979 and the labor camps of the Khmer Rouge.

Based on the true story of Cambodian advocate Arn Chorn-Pond, and authentically told from his point of view as a young boy, this is an achingly raw and powerful historical novel about a child of war who becomes a man of peace. It includes an author's note and acknowledgments from Arn Chorn-Pond himself.

When soldiers arrive in his hometown, Arn is just a normal little boy. But after the soldiers march the entire population into the countryside, his life is changed forever.

Arn is separated from his family and assigned to a labor camp: working in the rice paddies under a blazing sun, he sees the other children dying before his eyes. One day, the soldiers ask if any of the kids can play an instrument. Arn's never played a note in his life, but he volunteers.

This decision will save his life, but it will pull him into the very center of what we know today as the Killing Fields. And just as the country is about to be liberated, Arn is handed a gun and forced to become a soldier.

### **A Cambodian Prison Portrait - Vann Nath**

There are many myths about the Khmer Rouge's bloodthirstiness and brutality, but there was at least one place where they all were real: Security Prison 21, the secret police's killing machine. Of the 14,000 or so prisoners who were brought there for questioning, only a handful survived. One of them were the artist Vann Nath (1946-2011). In this thin little book, he describes his horrifying year behind the barbed wired walls of S-21. This book ranks among the most important and strongest witness-stories of world literature.



### **The Sea Wall - Marguerite Duras**

Marguerite Duras's breakthrough novel was published in 1950 and most of the elements that would become the base for her masterpiece, *The Lover*, more than 30 years later are already there. A fatherless French teenager, living in great poverty at a small plantation in rural Cambodia, gets involved with a much older but wealthy Chinese businessman. Age, race and class make them an impossible couple. Her mother and brother cynically tries to wring a few piastres out of the indecent affair. Less romantic and more sleazy than *The Lover*, but equally good.

### **The Lost Executioner - Nic Dunlop**

The head of S-21, Kang Kek Iew, AKA Comrade Duch, is central in this remarkable book. In 1997, the photographer and journalist Nic Dunlop more or less stumbled upon Duch, who had been hiding since the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979. Duch is a paradoxical figure: with a poor peasant background, he graduated as the second best student in the country. He got drawn into the Khmer Rouge and rose through the ranks. After the fall of the regime, he became a born again Christian. Dunlop's book is empathic, intelligent and a real page-turner. The monster becomes a man.

### **Building Cambodia - Helen Grant Ross and Darryl Leon Collings**

In the romantic picture of the old French Indochina, there are beautifully faded colonial buildings. But in Cambodia, it is actually the structures from the following decades that are the most fascinating. Blending traditional architecture with European modernism, the then young Cambodian architects, led by the maestro Vann Molyvann, created a fascinating school, like a Cambodian Bauhaus. This short-lived movement's legacy is now being destroyed by short-sighted capitalism. But the story is well told in this book, awash with beautiful photographs.

### **Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare - Philip Short**

In David Chandler's excellent biography *Brother Number One* from 1993, the author has an eerie feeling of being watched by the elusive and smiling dictator while he is writing the book. A decade later, Philip Short manages to drag Pol Pot out of the shadows. Where the earlier biographer had a more academic approach, Short's book reads almost like a thriller at times. The research he has put into the book is in itself mind blowing, and the result constitutes a large and important step towards understanding the Cambodian tragedy.

### **A Dragon Apparent - Norman Lewis**

This modern classic was once a beautiful account of a distant place: French Indochina in its twilight. Now it is also the story of a lost world. Norman Lewis traveled through Saigon to Phnom Penh, and then via Angkor Wat on to Laos. Every person Lewis meets – monks, farmers, royalty, colonialists – become important in his or her own right; the writer's keen eye for telling detail puts the reader right beside him.



### **Phnom Penh - Milton Osborne**

It's easy to be seduced by Phnom Penh, but also to be exhausted, as it's overwhelming in so many ways. It is therefore most helpful to read Milton Osborne's personal and interesting cultural and literary history of this fairly new capital (permanent since 1866). Osborne arrived in 1959 and the city has since been a continuing part of his life. His book will make the bustling city more comprehensible – though it remains as overwhelming as ever.

### **Cambodian Folk Stories from the Gatiloke - Kong Chhean**

A handful of the 112 folk stories in the Gatiloke, which was used by Cambodian monks to teach their faith and committed to paper in the late 19th century. One shouldn't make too much of this mix of fables, fairytales and moral lessons, but they offer an interesting insight into some traditional Cambodian beliefs. Some of them have slapstick qualities; others draw moral conclusions that are surprising to a western reader.

### **Pol Pot's Little Red Book - Henri Locard**

This is an intriguing little book for the interested reader who has already one or two more general titles about the Khmer Rouge under his belt. Henri Locard has collected and commented on hundreds of Khmer Rouge propaganda sayings; together they open the door to the chilling and paranoid mindset the revolution created. To quote one of the most famous lines: "To destroy you is no loss; to preserve you is no gain."

### **Four Faces - Han Suyin**

This novel is a charming bagatelle in Han Suyin's oeuvre. The story is set in the early 60s and revolves around a farcical author congress in Siem Reap, the small, sleepy town in the shadow of Angkor Wat. The congress is just a facade for cold-war conspiracy and suspicion – and shady opium trafficking. The farce, lightly sprinkled with eroticism, turns briefly into a political thriller, and then after a murder and a failed coup d'état, it turns yet again and becomes an Agatha Christie-inspired whodunnit, with the peaceful and slightly surreal Cambodian kingdom as a backdrop.