Part 400 for Cathy's blog

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We left Melbourne in January, 2023. It is now October, 2026. Where did those three and a half years go?

We had been to Siem Reap several times before our "big move" and we knew a lot about the town and the temples. We didn't know how many temples we were going to visit.

In the Siem Reap area (day trips), we have visited 125. There are still a few more nearby. Muddy roads /dirt roads hold us back in the wet season. And the hot sun limits us a bit too. The best time for "templing" is December and January.

That is also the best time for visiting family in Australia too, especially now we have the two grand-daughters.

We will just have to stay here for longer to get around to visiting more temples.



We are lucky to be able to visit temples more than once; indeed, we visit lots of times. There is always more to see.

This is the two storey library at Preah Khan, picturesque in the bright sunshine.



Here at Banteay Srey, the Hanuman statues look like they are wearing singlets.



There is always work being done at Angkor Wat.

After a temple visit, we head home, returning about 10:30 or so, and we have our at home activities.

I have blogs to write, Instagram posts to make and I have language study. I have been conscientious in my study. I am more fluent now (and more confident), but I am not fluent.

So when we saw a local conversation group advertised, practise your Khmer, we decided to go. The intent was good. Part of the problem was everyone was happy to talk in English!

I was surprised with how many foreigners were looking for an opportunity to speak Khmer.

I have my set of exercises and I like to swim every day.

Then there is (some) cleaning, the washing and sewing.

David has meal planning and preparation.

We have changed our eating habits. The purchase of the air fryer changed our meals. And the increase in our weight has necessitated another change in our eating habits.

We eat breakfast at home. David continues to cook us lunch and we often go out for tea.

This year, we have lost 15kg between us. Cutting out all snacks helped. I expect the motorbike is happy. I can wear all the clothes that I first brought to Cambodia (from Melbourne).

There is still a limited option of buying clothes here in Cambodia. It is not just a “fatness” issue. Cambodians are smaller people.

We still buy most of our clothes from Australia (and according to expats on the different expats face book pages, many people shop overseas or buy online and have things delivered).

For our groceries, we can buy nearly everything we want or need at the local supermarket.
There have been issues with the availability of fresh milk (due to the closed border with Thailand). Coffee can also be tricky to find and sometimes Vegemite is not available!

But most things are available. Sometimes our options involve different brands / companies / countries.

The shelves are well stocked and well presented.



At the moment, Vegemite is in stock (note the price is in US dollars!)



And there are choices we simply will not contemplate.



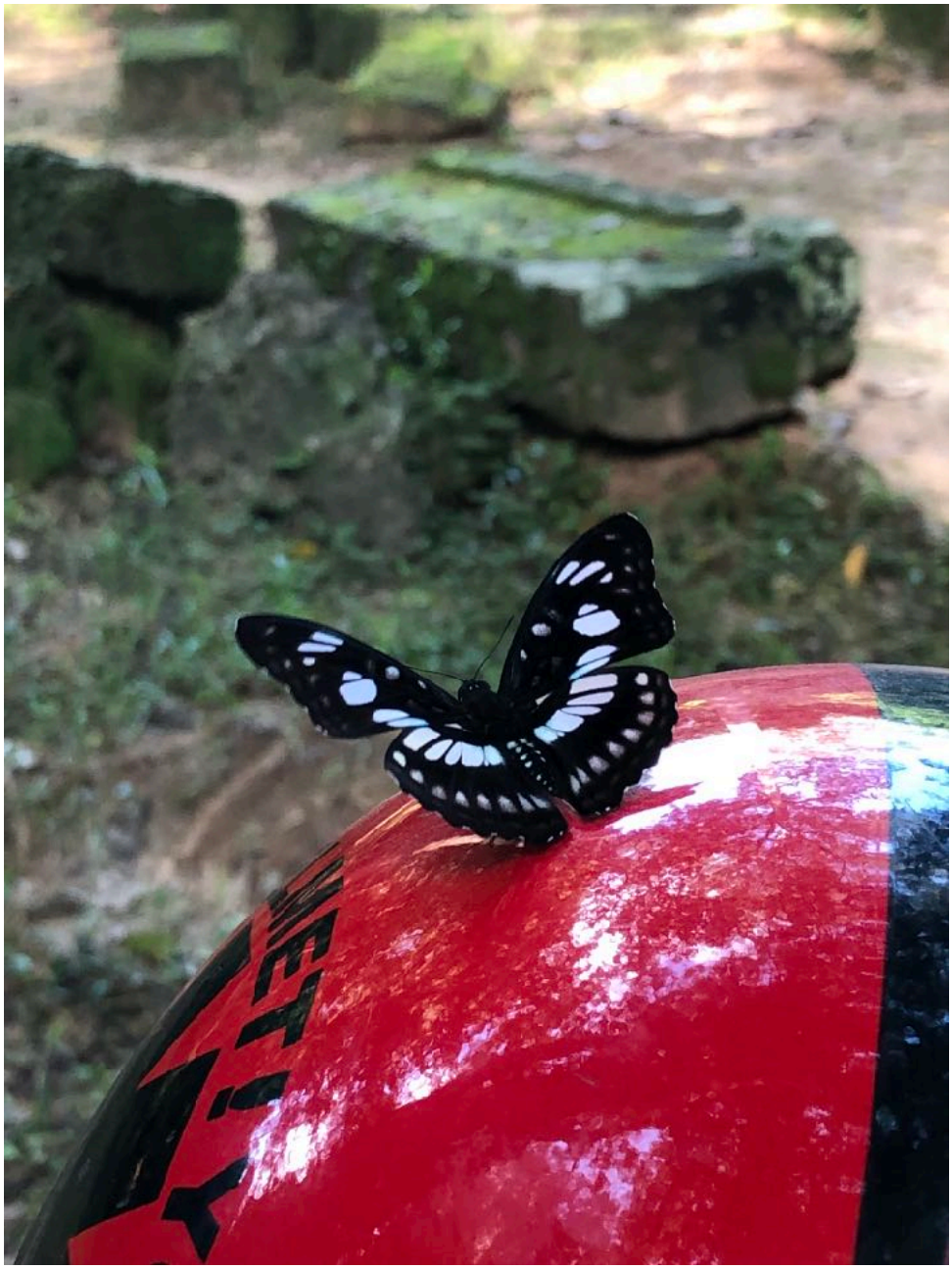
We easily use Khmer Riel now, with an exchange rate of about 4000 R to $1 US. The ABA QR code function on the phone is easy too. Even tuktuk fares of 8000R can be done through the app (unlimited payments). We still go to the bank about once a month, withdrawing 1000000R, and changing it from 100000R notes (not many things in Cambodia cost $25… tea for the two of us is less than $10 … less than 40000R).

Our motorbike is still going strong. We fill up about once a week, or a little more often. Our $3 of petrol has risen to over $4 due the rising fuel prices. It is still easy for us to find $4 a week for our transport, but it would be hurting the locals.

A motorbike service every 1000km costs $4.

We have ridden 22000 km on the bike.

The locals have just been granted a universal pay rise (based on the textile workers' pay rise) of $2 a month, increasing their wage to $212 a month (that's six days a week, too). The increase in petrol has used that up.



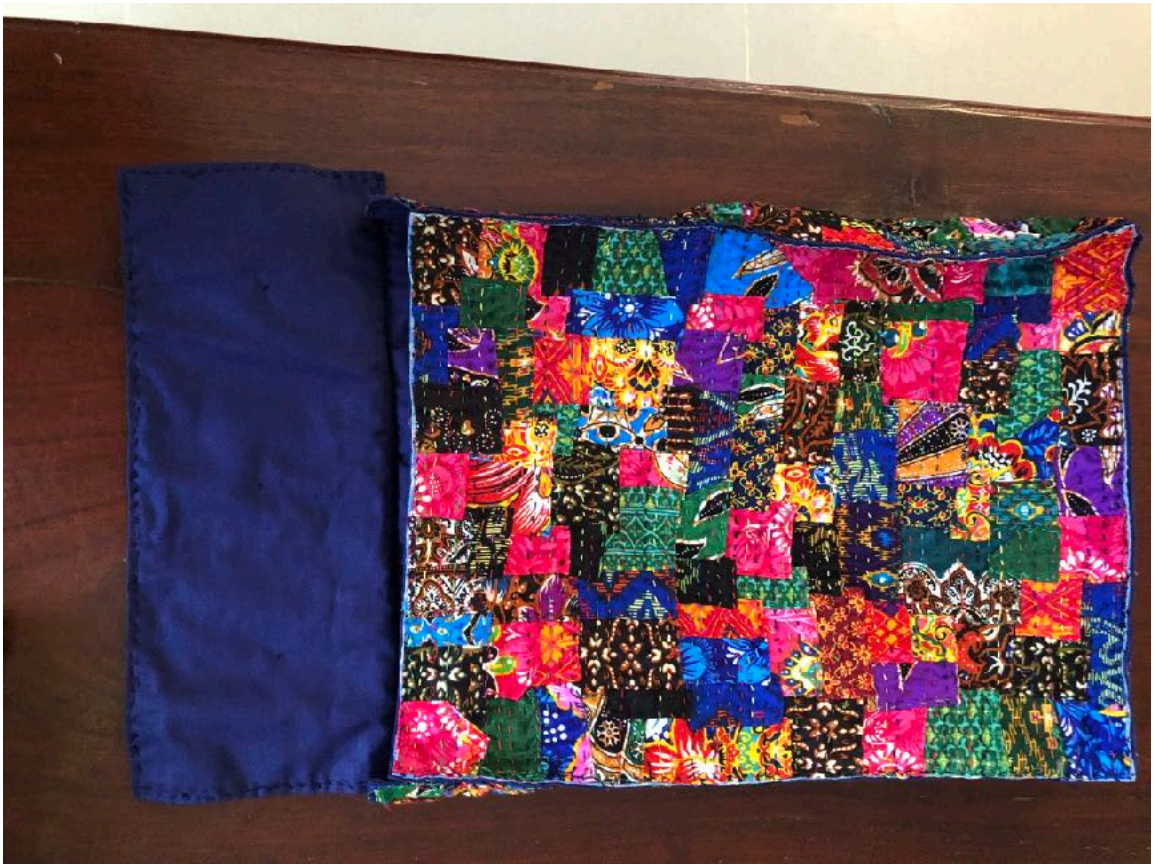
Our bike enables our temple exploration and makes getting around town easy.

Here at Leak Neang (near Ta Keo Temple), a butterfly has decided the bike helmet makes a good resting spot.

We have weathered another hot season. Throughout the hot season, we still got out every week day, except the very wet days (or when our tummies were upset, making any distance from a toilet a risky venture).

Our days out count as exercise and fresh air.

Back at our apartment, I fill in some of my time sewing little things for the grand-children. I have made sets of cloth dominoes, books, and matching / stacking shapes. I have also made more of the Kantha bags, using the bright prints of the cheap sarongs on sale at the local market.



We have been out several times to organised events, such as photography exhibitions or book launches. We tend to meet some of the same people at these events and it is nice to recognise faces and to know names. We have also been to birthday parties, both for adults and children.

At these events, I am surprised by how many Khmer people have a reasonable grasp of English. We are spoiled in Siem Reap, because we do not have to know Khmer.

There have been two births this year, resulting in three new babies here in Siem Reap that we know. (Our Tuktuk driver's second child was born last year!)

We were lucky to time our Australian visits to enable us to buy nice Australian themed clothing (and for our daughter to make some Australian themed baby quilts) for presents for the new babies. We also give money to these families, because they can buy baby things much more cheaply and easily than we can (and they know what they need / want).

We continue to give (a few) 5000R notes to the families that patrol the city streets, collecting recyclable rubbish and selling it on.

It is a small contribution.

We see poverty every day. We cannot solve it, but we can alleviate a small part of it.

We also see rubbish on the streets every day. I hope by Part 500, I will be able to talk about an initiative to clean up the streets that has been implemented and is producing results. The school students learn about it, but it seems it is easier to just toss your take-away food container to the side of the road, or drop your coffee cup, or just tear open your mass-produced snack and let the plastic wrapper fall to the ground.

We made a quick trip to Kuala Lumpur and experienced a mix of Malay and Indian food, stayed in a modern hotel in a modern city and braved the local traffic and crowds on trains, and in taxis and buses.



The Petronas Twin Towers, Kuala Lumpur

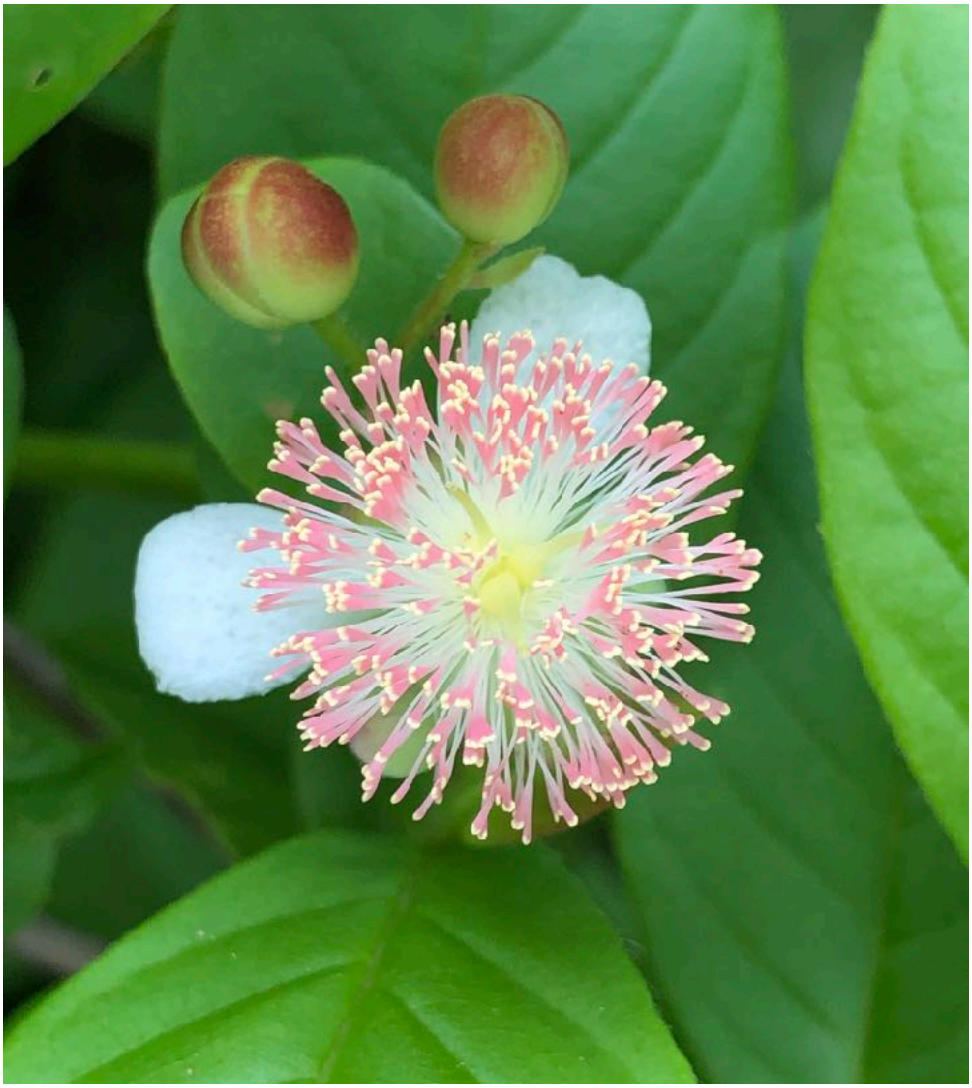


Street art in Kuala Lumpur.

Back in Siem Reap and the insects, plants and fungi we see on our trips to the temples continue to amaze me. I am pleased to say my photography skills are getting better (but not my patience).



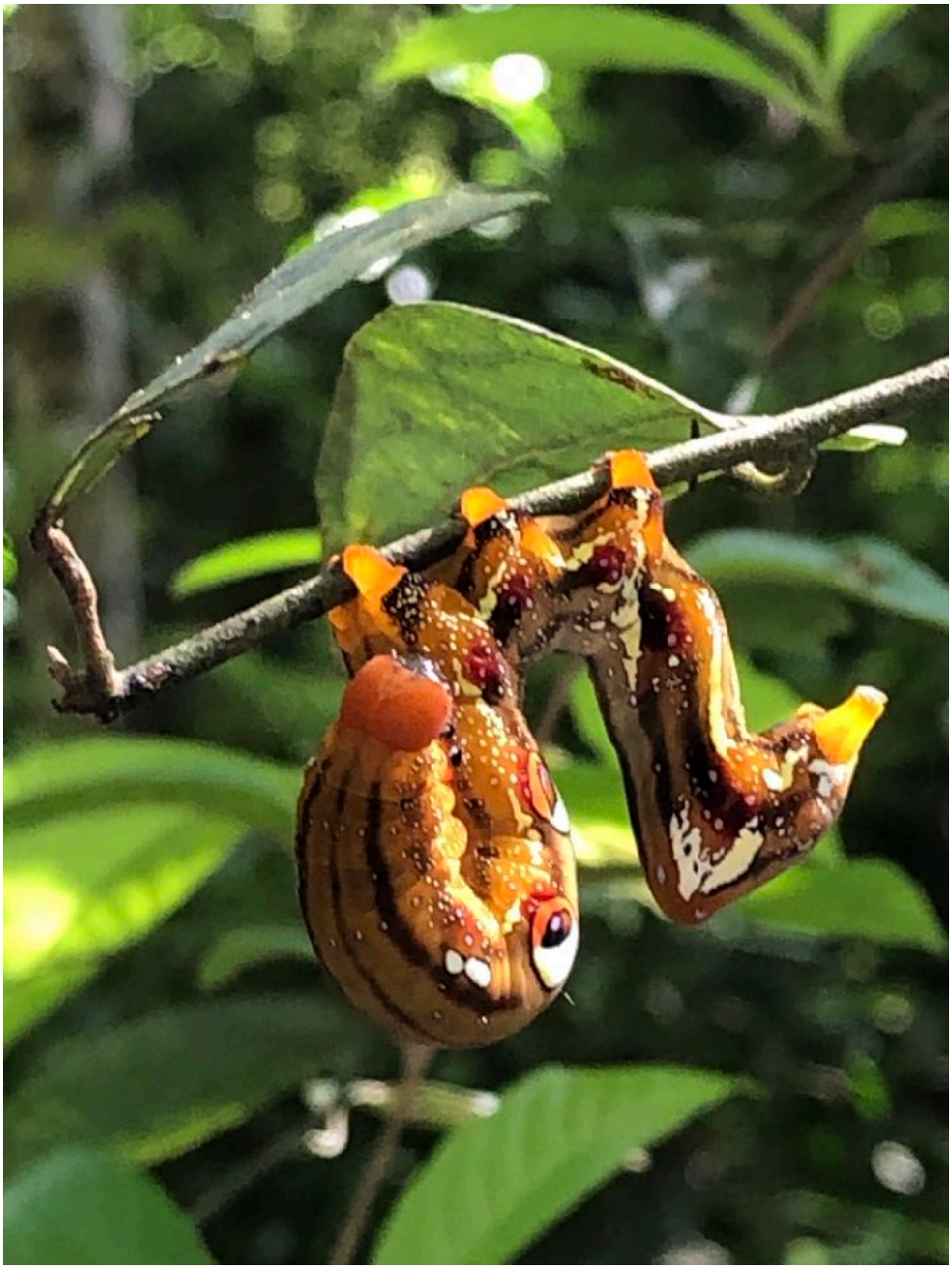
Plants that will leave you itchy.



Delicate flowers.



Bright flowers.



Strange creatures (the fruit piercing moth caterpillar).

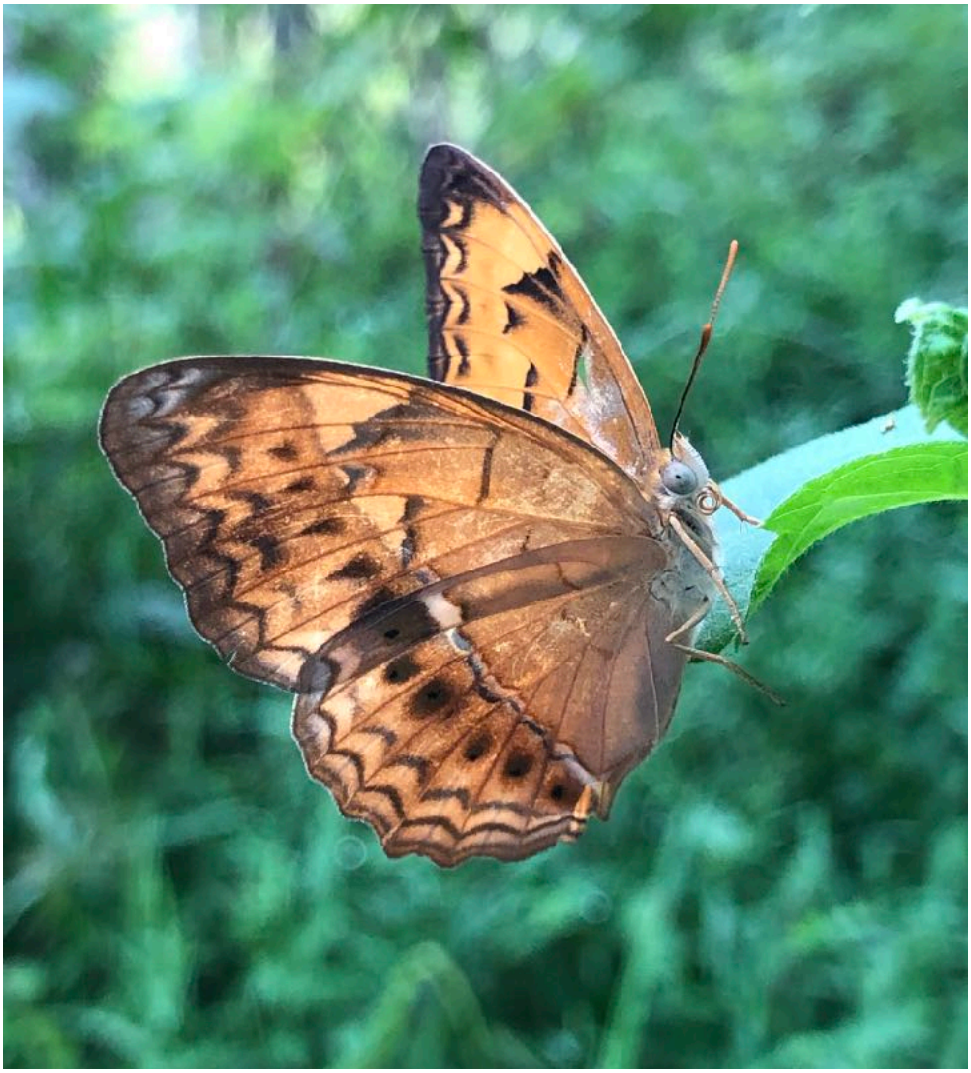


Dangerous creatures (scorpion).



Creatures that seem dangerous (but aren’t : a baby bronze back snake).

Creatures that are strange and beautiful at the same time.



Large fungi.





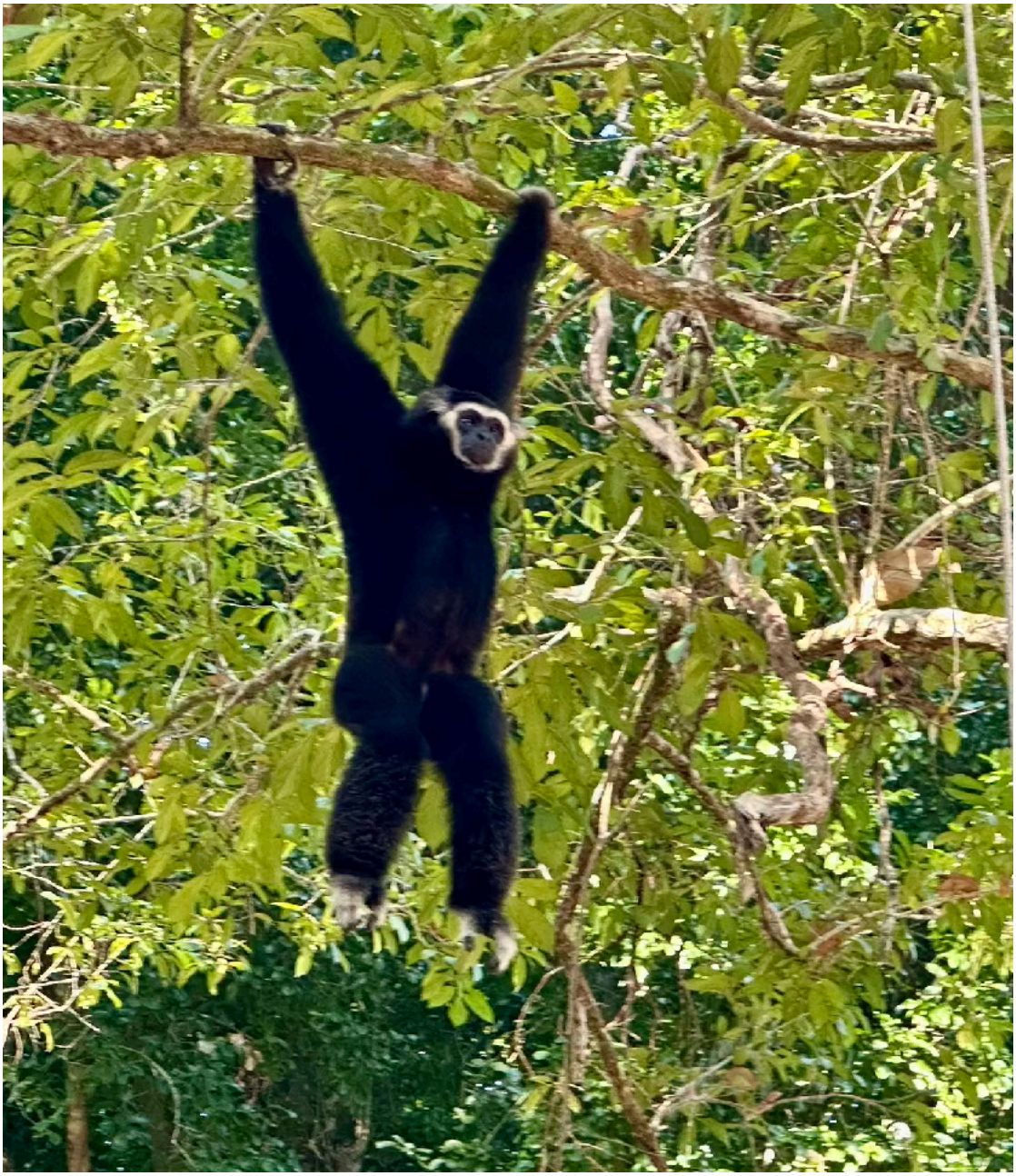
Small fungi.



Delicate insects.



Odd spiders.



Iconic animals.



And birds.

Even the physical world continues to surprise us.
Moonrise over the buildings seen from our balcony.



In the next year… or two… or more…

I am looking forward to more conversations in Khmer (and less stress with learning and practising the language).

I am looking forward to revisiting some of the out-lying temples and looking at them with new “eyes”, looking for things that match (or don’t!).

I am looking forward to watching the little ones here grow up. That happens very quickly.

And perhaps in the next several months, there is more travel, including another trip to Australia. Wait and see.

Life in Siem Reap is like a double rainbow : Siem Reap gives more than you expect.



Thanks for sharing our day to day activities and my thoughts about our life here in Siem Reap.