

How quick sketching can help you make the most of your travels

From ITINERARY TO ART Sketching Cambodia

By Craig Penny

Amazing temples, wonderful vistas over mighty lakes and friendly local villages with their colourful markets are all within easy reach when painting and sketching in and around Siem Reap, Cambodia.

With backdrops like the famous Angkor Temples and the remains of the lost city of Angkor Thom, from the ancient Khmer Empire, the subject matter is always compelling.

I use water-based mediums with a preference for pen and watercolour, so my kit reflects this. Positioned into my backpack, I take with me:

- a Winsor & Newton Watercolour travel set;
- a small watercolour palette with a lid;
- six sheets of A2 300gsm pen and wash paper;
- six sheets of Arches A2 300gsm watercolour paper;
- an A3 pad of pen and wash paper 300gsm; and
- an A4 sketch book with 300gsm paper.

I take a thin plywood board to use as support for the pads. My brushes are all suitable for watercolour:

- two mop brushes, (one medium and one small);
- a half inch flat;
- a quarter inch flat;
- a very thin liner style brush; and
- a dagger style brush.

I take a small collection of permanent ink felt pens that range from thick to thin and some 2B pencils.

A sample itinerary in Cambodia

On day one we settle in and meet the other art students. After a welcome dinner with cocktails and a good chat, everyone is eager to start the adventure.

Our second day starts straight after breakfast with an orientation tour by Tuk Tuk (a carriage pulled by a motorbike) of the town of Siem Reap. We stop at the Old Market in the centre of town, which presents a perfect opportunity to spend some time sketching the area. This area is very busy and is filled with motor bikes, Tuk Tuks and tourists. We are not far from our accommodation and I am happy to carry an A2 pad and my plywood support on the Tuk Tuk with me.

We sit at a café, and begin drawing quickly with an A2 sheet of

paper and a 2B pencil. Over the pencil I use a permanent black pen to line my drawing. I try to keep the pen on the paper as much as I can, to create a continuous line of movement. With a blend of washes, working from light to dark, I build up the sketch.

I focus on making the most complicated objects like motor bikes and Tuk Tuks simple, and resist the temptation to include everything in the sketch, deliberately leaving pencil and black line work uncovered.

I freely use opaque yellow, white and skin-tone colour to exaggerate the simple figures and highlights, and with the liner brush paint the wheels of the motor bikes. I work for about an hour. That's what travel sketching needs to be - quick, uncomplicated.....and fun!

"I focus on making the most complicated objects like motor bikes and Tuk Tuks simple, and resist the temptation to include everything in the sketch, deliberately leaving pencil and black line work uncovered"

The quick sketch process

- Draw quickly with 2B pencil - don't worry about detail!
- Line the drawing with permanent black pen
- Go for continuous line movement
- Use washes to build up the sketch

Sketch 1

Our third day is a trip by Tuk Tuk to the amazing Angkor Wat and Ta Prohm temples. In my backpack, I take my A3 pad and the travel watercolour set. I work as quickly as I can, spending no more than 30 minutes on each sketch.

** Notice how figures in the shade of the awning are merely suggested with simple brush strokes.



Sketches 2, 3 & 4

Day four is a master class day. The students and I work in a class environment at our accommodation premises. I present them with two printed photos of local market scenes. The challenge, using watercolour only, is to reinterpret the scenes and to depict the essential items of the photos. Keep it simple.

Our fifth day starts early in the morning. We are off to the ancient city of Angkor Thom. Here are vast areas of parklands and many temples and you can also feed the elephants.

Day six is a free day. I head back to the Old Market in the middle of town, find a café and buy a cool drink. The owners don't mind if you sit and sketch, as long as you buy the occasional drink. Again I draw on an A2 sheet, and try to capture the energy and movement going on around me. There is lots to explore around town with plenty of great food and shopping. When you finish, it is a gentle Tuk Tuk ride back to the accommodation, and the pool and cocktail bar will be most welcome.

** Notice how I am just focusing on main shapes and suggesting that there is detail within those shapes, without including the detail.





Image 5

Day seven is a wonderful treat. By Tuk Tuk we visit the village of Roluos, and on the way the stilted village of Kompong Phluk on the great lake of Tonle Sap.

While we are in Roluos, I try something different - two sketches quickly. We don't have long here, about an hour. Using an A2 sheet of watercolour paper, I sketch in pencil and outline over the top of the pencil with a dagger brush using heavy Sepia paint from a tube, instead of black pen. This creates many shapes. With strong watercolour paint I simply fill in the shapes while the outline is still wet. I use some splatter work and gouache to help create movement.

****A sketch such as this captures the character of the location - I suggest a busy street life which is colourful and full of the elements which make it recognisable and unique.**

Images 6 & 7

The stilted village of Kompong Phluk is a sketcher's dream. There is so much to observe and you are compelled to look, so out comes the camera. The village is on the river that runs into the great lake of Tonle Sap. We stop here for lunch and to sketch. An A3 sketch is appropriate and the drawing subject is challenging to say the least.

**** These two sketches show how to uncomplicate complicated subjects such as marketplace scenes with many figures, stalls and objects.**



Image 8

The eighth day is our last master class. I supply photographic prints of Kompong Phluk, the stilted village by the great lake. The stilted houses on the river are a challenge to sketch. Many elements need to be considered, such as colour, shape, depth, perspective and reflections.

On an A2 sheet of watercolour paper, I sketch firstly in pencil and then outline in Sepia again. I use lots of blended washes and opaque blue paint.

****This shows how effective the combination of using drawing and outlining together with colour can be in a sketch. It helps keep the subject from becoming overblown.**



Image 9

We are coming to the end of the trip and day nine is for relaxing and shopping. We all enjoy a farewell dinner and an art show on the final night, before our farewells the next day.

**** By developing your own style in travel sketching you can come home with a number of sketches that are basically small spontaneous paintings and are lovely to frame up and enjoy!**



about the artist

Born in Mildura in 1961, Craig showed an interest in art and drawing at a very young age. In 1970, his family moved to the Western District of Victoria. His love of art saw him enrol in the art course at Hamilton Technical School in 1976. At the age of 16 his artistic interests extended into ceramics and sculpture, and he constructed several wood fired kilns in his parents' backyard.

Craig studied art at Ballarat University, where painting and graphic design attracted most of his attention. Craig pursued a successful career as an illustrator in the advertising industry and became a member of the

Illustrators Association of Australia.

Craig's career has progressed into a range of mediums including skills in computer graphics. As a result Craig has also undertaken a successful career in teaching both traditional drawing and illustration and digital drawing and illustration at both Victoria University and Swinburne University. Throughout this time, he never lost his love of using traditional methods and subsequently specialized in watercolour and acrylic painting and illustrations. This has led to an extremely successful solo career.

In 2001, Craig had his first major solo exhibition at Manyung Gallery in Mt Eliza, Victoria. In 2007, his work was accepted by Gallery Diamante in Carmel California. Craig has lead painting and sketching trips to Cambodia, Veitnam, Greek Islands, France and Japan.

Want to learn to loosen up on style and technique in a hurry? Join Craig Penny on a tour or a workshop. See his website for details of 2017 opportunities:

www.craigpennyart.com.au