



Image: J. V. d. Putten

Introduction to Khmer I, 57-332 Cambodian Language for Beginners

WiSe 2026/ 2027



Image: S. Pech und S. Prum

The Kingdom of Cambodia & the Khmer Language

The Kingdom of Cambodia is a fascinating Southeast Asian country bordered by Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos, and enclosed by a picturesque coastline to the south. With a total area of 181,035 km²—which is roughly half the size of Germany or slightly more than twice the size of Austria—the country is divided into 24 provinces and the special administrative region of the capital, Phnom Penh.

The Language: Khmer (Cambodian)

The official language of Cambodia belongs to the Austroasiatic language family. Historically, it was heavily influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism (deriving elements from Sanskrit and Pali) and is currently spoken by around 17 to 20 million people both inside and outside of Cambodia.

What Makes Khmer Special:

- **No Tones:** Unlike its neighboring languages (Thai, Lao, Vietnamese), Khmer is not a tonal language. Therefore, the meaning of a word does not change based on pitch.
- **Isolating Grammar:** The grammar of the Khmer language is straightforward. There are no conjugations, declensions, or case endings. Verbs and nouns always remain unchanged, regardless of whether they are singular or plural.
- **Sentence Structure & Tenses:** It follows the classic Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order. Tenses (past, present, and future) are expressed simply through additional time markers or adverbs.
- **The Writing System:** The Khmer script is an abugida (syllabic alphabet). With 33 consonants, 24 vowels, and 14 independent vowels, **it is considered one of the largest alphabets in the world.**

This Khmer course for beginners in the winter semester 2026/27 is open to all students from all faculties as well as guest students (Kontaktstudierende).

NO PRIOR KNOWLEDGE IS REQUIRED!

With this seminar, you can acquire the essential foundations of the Khmer language and learn to understand and use familiar, everyday expressions and very simple sentences.

Should you have any difficulties with registration or any questions, please contact the lecturer directly before the start of the course, or make sure to attend the first class to discuss how to proceed.

Registration: If you would like to learn this unique language and gain deeper insights into the culture and history of Cambodia, you can register as usual in STiNE under the course: **57-332 Introduction to the Khmer Language**