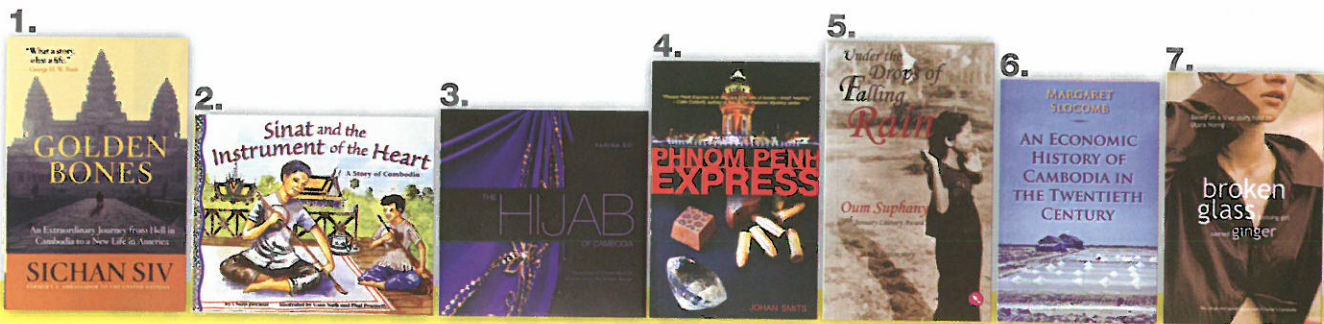


Required Reading in the Kingdom

The country's publishing scene may pale in comparison to those in neighbouring countries, but a few fresh fiction and nonfiction from local and international authors merit a bookshop run. With no shortage of spellbinding stories to choose from, **Lindsay Muscato** rounds up some recently-published volumes ready for a spot on your shelf. Photo by **Conor Wall**.





1 Golden Bones by Sichan Siv

This harrowing memoir was written by a former US ambassador to the United Nations who escaped from the slave labour regime imposed by the Khmer Rouge. Siv traverses the countryside, hiding his glasses and eschewing his intellectual upbringing, until landing at a ramshackle refugee camp in Thailand. From there his pre-war friendships help him find a way out, and his dangerous journey through the jungle ends with arrival in the United States, where he goes from a New York City cab driver to become a White House aide and eventually a respected international representative. Thoughtful and well told, it's a personal and gripping story of someone who defied the odds.

2 Sinat and the Instrument of the Heart by Chath PierSath

A children's book that plucks the heart-strings, based on a true story. Sinat longs for a trip to Siem Reap. When his parents finally take him on the long journey to the Angkor Wat, his adventure begins. There he meets a master teacher who shows him how to play a 2,000 year-old string instrument, the Kse Diev. Readers follow his dream's progress all the way to the Royal Palace. It's told through sweet, spare prose by prominent poet and artist Chath PierSath, with charming illustrations by Phal Pouriseth and Vann Nath, one of the few survivors of S-21.

3 The Hijab of Cambodia: Memory of Cham Muslim Women after the Khmer Rouge by Farina So

Under the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia's Cham population was targeted with particular brutality. Author Farina So narrates the memories of Cham women who endured extremely harsh conditions,

sacrificed religious principles and prayed in secret. The project is part of So's long-time collaboration with the Documentation Centre of Cambodia, drawing on material from more than 100 interviews. And it's more than just stories—So analyses the very nature of memories formed in tragedy. Each section of the book reveals tender personal tales of heartbreak, separation and loss as well as pride and survival. Especially stunning are photos of traditional jewel-toned hijabs (Muslim veils).

4 Phnom Penh Express by Johan Smits

Cambodia's first chocolate chef becomes embroiled in a turf war between the diamond mafia. Who knew life in the chocolate trade could get so risky? This dark but cheeky mystery tells the story of Phirum, a half-Belgian, half-Cambodian who gets in over his head when murder and love makes life more complicated than he'd dreamed. Expat readers will smile at the nods to everyday scenes of Phnom Penh and familiar spots along Street 240. Plus they'll relate to Phirum's elation at finding a bar that serves Belgian beer. It's a fast, engaging read that is perfect for the bedside table or beach.

5 Under the Drops of Falling Rain by Oum Suphany

This first novel of Oum Suphany—the winner of the SEA Write Award—weaves a fictional tale around the historical truth of life under the Khmer Rouge. First published in Khmer and translated into English nearly a decade later, it tells the story of an arranged marriage formed as the country's culture dissolves. The intimate narrative style and discussion of Khmer culture make it an up-close look at the time period despite its designation as "fiction".

Through the particular lives and minds of her characters, Suphany muses on the fate of Cambodia as a whole.

6 An Economic History of Cambodia by Margaret Slocomb

Author Margaret Slocomb tracks the country's economic development from the latter half of the French protectorate through the end of 2005. With the clarity wrought by hindsight and rigorous research, it unravels the economic factors that drove war and unrest in Cambodia. Strands studied include the land's physical geography, foreign trade and aid and the actions of the elite—all leading to today's current state of development. It's a different way to page through Cambodian history, especially suited for NGO and development workers in Cambodia or anyone interested in the country's often erratic economic path to the present.

7 Broken Glass: A Young Girl Named Ginger by Utara Norng

This true story splices a mother's journey under the Khmer Rouge with that of her daughter, Ginger. While her mother endured a brutal regime, Ginger now navigates a dangerous life as a teenager and bar girl, undergoing several abortions at a young age and learning about love the hard way. Told to the author as part of a project with the Documentation Centre of Cambodia, it's a raw and personal juxtaposition of the past and present, illuminating love and struggle experienced by mother and daughter in entirely different circumstances. The confessional style and straightforward prose make Ginger's risky nights come to life. **KL**