

## **The case study: Heritage Watch in Cambodia**

**Source:** **Source:** [www.heritagewatchinternational.org](http://www.heritagewatchinternational.org), cited in Park, 2014, p. 161, Heritage Tourism

Heritage Watch, a non-profit organization, was founded in 2003 in order to preserve Southeast Asia's cultural heritage. Heritage Watch launched an innovative project of heritage protection and poverty reduction at one of Southeast Asia's largest temple complexes, the ancient Khmer capital of Koh Ker in 2007. This project was supported by various organizations and private donors, including Friends of Khmer Culture, Pety Ride, the Fonds Famille vanBeek and Lonely Planet. This tenth century site, home to dozens of magnificent temples, was isolated for much of the last century by war, landmines and poor roads. But due to recent demining efforts and improved roads, Koh Ker is now poised to become a major tourist destination. Through the project, Heritage Watch promoted the protection of the temple complex while providing a sustainable development strategy. The area is among the poorest in Cambodia where the majority of local people are disabled landmine victims who mainly rely on farming and forest scavenging for subsistence. This poverty has naturally exacerbated looting at Koh Ker, which was heavily plundered in the 1990s. However, much of this remarkable site is still intact, and its future protection hinges on the local community being able to benefit from the coming economic boom. Heritage Watch provided training in heritage protection and conservation for the local community, organizing and equipping community patrols to protect the temples from looting. It also established a baseline survey of past looting at the temples and, using this, recent thefts can easily be detected. These patrols were provided with training in basic environmental management, including picking up litter and emptying rubbish bins. Training in tourism at a basic level was also provided, so that the villagers could establish sustainable businesses near the temples- such as refreshment stands, ox- cart tours of the site and traditional craft sales. Village women and the disabled, some of the most disadvantaged groups in the community, will be trained in the production of these crafts. Income was generated by the villagers through the sale of craft goods, ox- cart rides and other products. Perhaps most importantly, this project illustrated to the entirety of Cambodia that protecting heritage is more financially advantageous than destroying it.