

# Cambodia to allow foreigners to leave with surrogate babies

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The Cambodian government is set to allow foreign couples to return home with babies conceived to surrogates before the 'womb for rent' business was banned last year, an official said Monday.

Curbs on the surrogacy industry in neighbouring Thailand and India sparked a boom in the unregulated baby business in impoverished Cambodia, with Australian couples in particular turning to the kingdom.

But late last year Cambodian authorities banned [commercial surrogacy](#) and refused to legalise birth certificates for babies.

This prevented foreign parents—many believed to be Australians—from taking the children out of the country, although the couples were able to travel in and out of Cambodia.

But an official told AFP the restriction is poised to change after Prime Minister Hun Sen approved an "exit strategy" allowing babies who were born to—or being carried by—surrogates before the ban to leave.

"We will allow parents who have surrogate babies born (before the ban) to take them out," according to Chou Bun Eng, secretary of state at the Ministry of Interior.

She said foreign couples had to follow the law and show a DNA match in order to claim their babies, while the surrogate's husband had to testify that the baby did not belong to him.

"We also need the parents to say why they have asked others to carry babies for them," Chou Bun Eng added.

"We will facilitate the process and will not create any difficulty for the parents," she said.

But she warned that parents tempted to try to take their children out of Cambodia illegally would face criminal charges.

Surrogacy agencies started springing up in the Southeast Asian nation after India and Thailand blocked foreigners from the services following a flurry of scandals and concerns about exploitation

With cheap medical costs and no laws excluding gay couples or single [parents](#), Cambodia quickly soaked up much of the demand.

In November, Australian nurse Tammy Davis-Charles, 49, was arrested for allegedly running an illegal [surrogacy](#) service in Cambodia—arranging for more than 20 Cambodian women to carry [babies](#) for Australian couples.

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