

Cycle Touring Cambodia (10)

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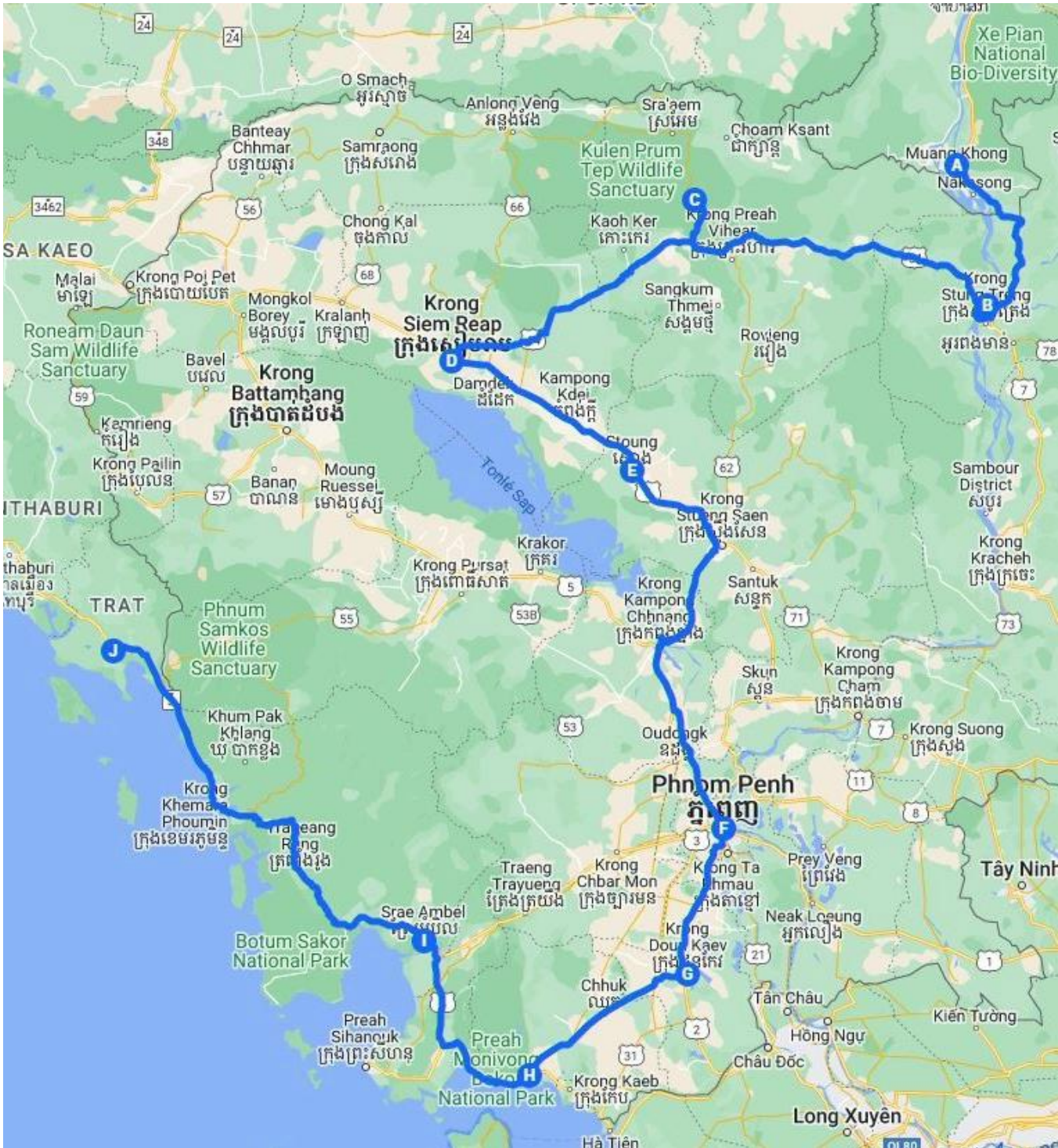




CYCLE TOURING CAMBODIA (10)
1 042 Km – 17 Days

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Thank you

I want to thank the kind, generous strangers who showed me random acts of kindness during my cycle tour in Cambodia. Their generosity humbled me and made me appreciate the goodness in people.

A special thanks to my sister Amanda, who diligently kept my journal entries and photos well-organized over the years. Without her support, I would not have been able to document my travels.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my friend Val Abrahamse, who managed my personal and financial affairs while I explored the world. Her conscientious efforts made it possible for me to pursue my dreams.

Cycle Touring Cambodia (10)

1 042 Km – 17 Days



CAMBODIA (10)

1 042 Km – 17 Days

Muang Khong - Stung Treng - 100 km

I began my day with a steaming cup of coffee as I prepared for my ride across the bridge to join Route 13 South. Despite the brisk wind tugging at my clothes, I felt a surge of excitement at the prospect of returning to Cambodia after nearly five years, when I cycled the country with my friends Megan, Erma, and Janice.

The process of getting stamped out of Laos turned out to be surprisingly straightforward, despite the border post's notorious reputation for bribery. The officers requested a \$2 stamp fee, but I firmly declined, and they didn't push the issue. The Cambodian immigration process was much smoother, and I paid the \$35 visa fee before resuming my journey.

The road leading south was in a sorry state due to ongoing repairs, and it was covered in a thick layer of gravel that made cycling a challenge. Fortunately, motorbikes had carved out a single track next to the road. Although signs periodically indicated the "End of road work," the gravel would quickly reappear, and I kept reassuring myself with the mantra, "This too shall pass."

On a more positive note, I had the pleasure of meeting another cyclist from Japan who was also on a cycling adventure through Asia. I also discovered that Cambodia was in the midst of celebrating Pchum Ben, or the Festival of the Ancestors, one of the country's most significant and grandest festivals.



I caught glimpses of the festivities, witnessing two-wheel tractors laden with villagers passing by in the opposite direction.

By the time I arrived in Stung Treng, it was late, and I struggled to find a hotel with available rooms, most likely due to the festivities. I settled for one that offered an air-conditioned room with a window for \$12, but I found the cleanliness lacking, and I wondered if my frugality was worth it.

I decided to stay in Stung Treng the next day to withdraw Cambodian riel or Khmer riel (KHR) (4 000 KHR = 1 US\$), a SIM card, and take care of a few other things.





Stung Streng – Preah Vihear – 140 km

I felt remarkably energetic, and the weather and the road were good. As a result, I pushed on. I forgot just how scenic Cambodia is. Numerous unusual sights kept me occupied, and I again realised just how comfortable the Cambodians are on a motorbike, as twice I saw people returning from the clinic with an IV drip bag on a stick attached to their arm.

I don't know what was in the drink I bought from a roadside vendor as I was so energetic that I cycled the 140 kilometres to Preah Vihear. Once there, I was more than happy to find Javier Guest House, which has a lovely large room for only \$7.







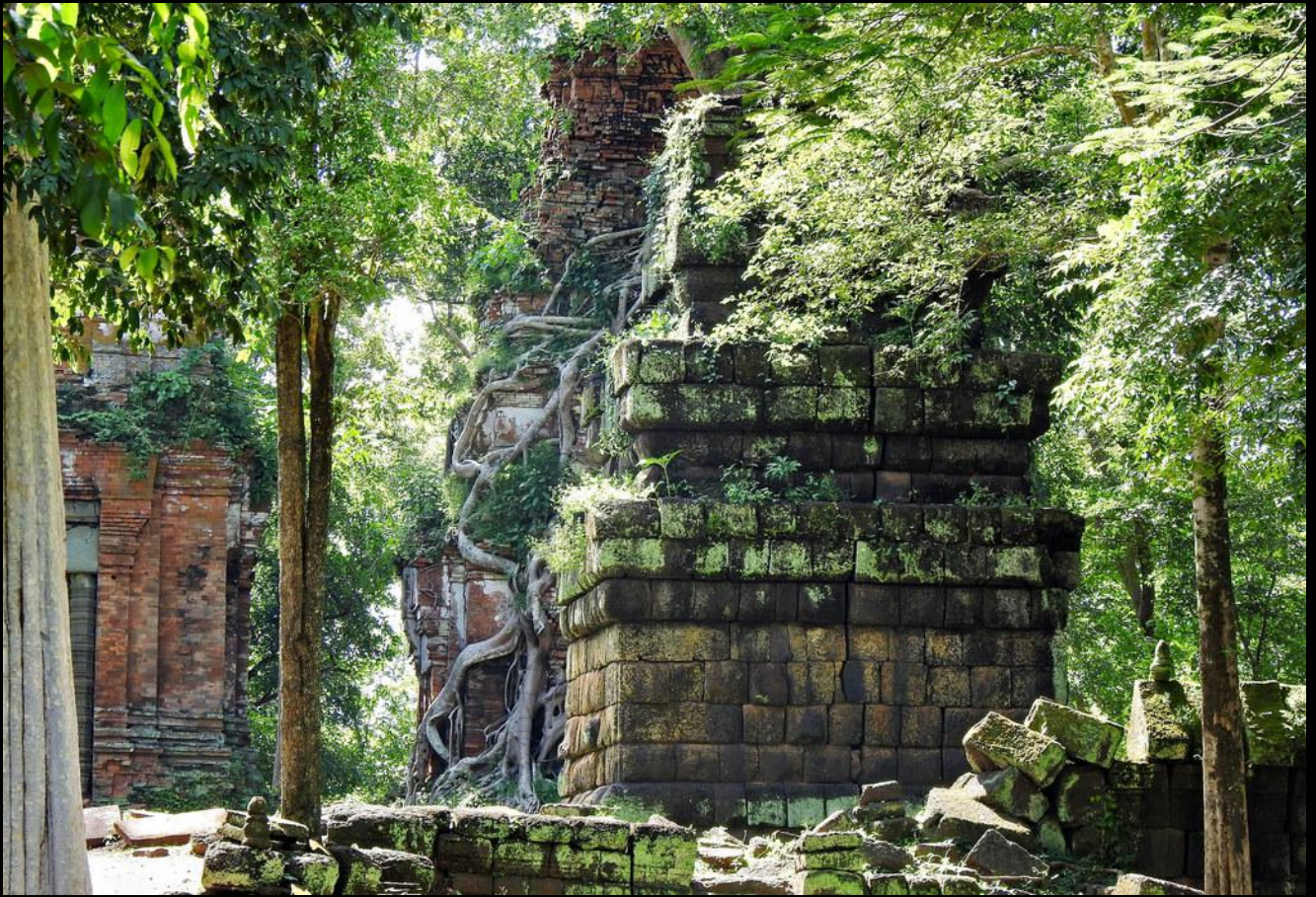


Preah Vihear – Phumi Moreal, Heng Guest House – 83 km

I wasn't all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and my morning search for a baguette did not reveal anything, so I got on the road and headed toward Siam Reap. Again, the scenery was unsurpassed, and it turned out to be a lovely day of riding.

Sixty kilometres later, I came upon Koh Ker, a UNESCO World Heritage and Archaeological Site. This ancient capital of the Khmer Empire between 921 and 944 CE is now partially hidden in a dense forest. I dropped my bags at a guesthouse and went exploring. I returned after six p.m. and headed straight to a restaurant, starving.









Phumi Moreal – Siam Reap – 100 km

It rained throughout the night, and I could still hear it pouring when I woke up. I stayed in bed with a coffee and played on my phone until I heard the rain subsiding. It was thus late morning by the time I saddled my old iron horse for the ride to Siam Reap.

I felt immensely happy to be on the bike, pedalling down a rural road. The sound of children calling "Hello, farang!" always brought a smile to my face, their voices blending with the sound of cattle. If you didn't respond, they would keep calling louder and louder, their excitement echoing through the countryside.

This is such a rural part of Cambodia that, at times, I could imagine I'm on a different planet. By the time I neared touristy Siam Reap, I was somewhat taken aback by the urgency of the drivers and the chaotic dance of traffic, which sharply contrasted with the peaceful countryside. Still, I joined this dance and made my way to Smiley Guesthouse, which has ground-floor budget rooms and a swimming pool. It's a good place to lay low, and I paid for three nights.

On stepping out, I thought I could easily spend the three days eating as the aroma of the local delicacies wafted through the air. I imagined myself exploring all the culinary delights of the area.

The following day, I took the bicycle to the bike shop to be cleaned and oiled. I was shocked at the prices in Siam Reap. When prices are quoted in US\$, you know you have been overcharged. So, nothing much came of eating at all the restaurants that looked so inviting the previous evening as they were clearly priced with tourists in mind. Eventually, I grabbed a baguette with egg and salad from a mobile vendor at less than half the price at the sit-down restaurants. I also handed in my laundry to get a proper machine wash as it's a fee I never complain about.



Siam Reap – Stoung – 102 km

I made a bit of a detour because I didn't want to cycle along the main road, but the minor road I chose soon spat me out on the main road south. I guess I'll never get used to Cambodia's ingenious means of transport. There is nothing they cannot transport by bicycle or a two-wheel tractor.

Once away from Siam Reap, the road was quiet and a pleasure to cycle. The rain lasted no more than 10 minutes, and soon the sun was shining bright again. I met the nicest people; a man stopped and handed me a Pocari Sweat. How nice was that? Later, I stopped to take a break and met a mum and her daughter who could speak some English. She was ever so helpful, and we took a few selfies.

I was on the old Khmer highway between Angkor and Phnom Penh. It's a new road today, but surprisingly, the Kampong Kdei Bridge is still in use. Built in the twelfth century, Spean Praptos, also known as Kampong Kdei Bridge, used to be the longest corbeled stone-arch bridge in the world, with over twenty narrow arches spanning 87 metres.

I arrived in Stoung at around four p.m. It is a typical Cambodian small town with a market, a temple, muddy roads, a petrol station, bug vendors, and the ever-present mobile food carts.

My guest house cost US\$8, and the room was as big as a dancehall. Taking the stir my presence created, I didn't think a farang had ever stayed at this establishment; great was my surprise thus when I discovered a young American lady also staying at the guesthouse and travelling by bicycle. She was heading to Siam Reap and this was her fourth day on her first cycling holiday.







Stoung – Won With Guest House – 110 km

In a 2021 survey, it was found that approximately 63 percent of households in Cambodia are engaged in agricultural production. It's therefore common to see wooden houses on stilts with chickens, buffalos, cows, palm and mango trees next to rice fields.

Today, I came across many "ambok", or flattened rice, producers along the road. The rice seemed to be first roasted in a pan with a mechanical stirrer, then pounded in a wooden bowl and separated from the husk in a sieve. During the rice harvest, some rice is specially prepared for certain Khmer ceremonies and family gatherings. I regret not buying any, but hopefully, I'll find them again tomorrow.

After 110 kilometres, I found Win With Guesthouse, a perfect spot midway between Phnom Penh and Stoung. Once again, the experience of finding food was fascinating and amusing.





Win With or Von Vith Guest House - Phnom Penh - 110km

The ride to Phnom Pehn was surprisingly easy, as it is a new road. Still, it was pretty boring, and I believe that my ride along the river trail was far more interesting. However, it was easy riding, although not much happened except for stopping at Skun, known as Spider Village. The reason is that it's a place well known for the exotic cuisine of tarantulas. Vendors sold deep-fried tarantulas coated in garlic and chillies, and although the aroma was appetising, I don't think I can ever get myself to eat a tarantula.

The last stretch into the capital was easy-going except for the chaotic traffic. I rarely made a booking, but this time I did and, as always, it was a total disaster, and I didn't stay at the place booked. I, however, easily found a room as just about every second building in Phnom Pehn is a guesthouse.

I stayed in Phnom Penh for three nights as I quite liked the place, and I had the usual housekeeping to attend to. I also met up with Matt, a friend for many years and we had supper at the Addis Restaurant. I love Ethiopian food, and the food at Addis is excellent and it made for a lovely and relaxing evening.











Phnom Penh – Krong Doun Kaev – 103 km

As I left the bustling city of Phnom Penh, I found myself navigating through the chaotic Monday morning traffic. It always takes some time to adjust to the constant flow of vehicles and the need to trust the traffic around me. Once I cleared the city limits, I followed a narrow path along the serene Bassac River.

A sign directed towards Chisor Mountain Temple caught my eye, prompting me to change my course to the west. To my delight, I stumbled upon the ancient ruins of this eleventh-century temple perched high on a hill, accessible by a lengthy staircase. Despite the heat and swarms of mosquitoes, I persevered and was delighted to reach the remains of this old temple. However, my battle with the mosquitoes eventually forced me to cut my visit short.

By the time I finished, it was already late afternoon, but I decided to cycle to the next village, which was only 30 kilometres away.









1850
I LOVE M. P. ...
1820
R. ...

Krong Doun Kaev – Kampot - 86 km

Again, the Main Road to Kampot was a dead boring affair. That said, the road was new, wide and in good condition, so I shouldn't complain. It's just that I don't like such predictability. In any event, I stuck to the main road and soon landed in the lovely riverside town of Kampot.

I've visited Kampot on many occasions and this time I chose to stay in the village. Good Morning Kampot Guesthouse was an ideal place to stay as it was slap bang in the centre of town and right on the river. It also offered spacious budget rooms on the upper floors with a restaurant below. Reviews stated that the food was excellent. I think whoever made those comments must have been British, as the food was so bland that I had to ask for a portion of fresh chillies to make it more palatable. LOL.

I paid for two nights and was slow to rise the following morning. With no plans for the day, I handed in my laundry as whenever I have a chance of having my laundry done for a dollar, I can't resist. I did truly little the rest of the day except visit the Kampot market as no one can be in Kampot and not go to the market or buy the famous Kampot pepper, known as the best pepper in the world.

I was up early to collect my laundry, but the lady couldn't find it and asked that I return later. There wasn't much to do in Kampot, so I took my bicycle and cycled to the old fishing village on the opposite side of the river. Much later, I returned and was happy to find that my laundry was located. I was so happy that I treated myself to nachos & gaugamela in Kampot Alley, where noodles are still handmade, and something is always steaming in a pot.











Kampot – Srae Ambel – 108 km

After doing almost nothing for two full days, I felt pretty energetic and was eager to get underway. I had no specific plan and contemplated going to Sihanoukville.

The day started with a lovely scenic ride, and I was happy to be out on the bike. This euphoria, however, came to a grinding halt when the paved road abruptly disappeared after approximately 25 kilometres. It was not a disaster until I realised this was no ordinary dirt road but one that had been neglected for years, and I thought it resembled a minefield (not that I knew what a minefield looked like). In any event, I persevered, bouncing over the potholes and slip-sliding through the muddy patches. Conditions worsened as the day progressed, and I had my eye set on the junction 20 kilometres away, believing conditions would improve from there. I clawed onto the handlebars for dear life, and after five kilometres, I stopped to take a breather, feeling happy I managed five kilometres. My wrists and arms felt shaky, but I returned to the bike, determined to reach the main road. And so it went until I reached the junction.

It was already quite late, and instead of going to Sihanoukville, I decided to head straight to Srae Ambel. You can imagine my surprise when I found the road (although paved) in dreadful condition, busy and narrow. So narrow was the road that two trucks could barely pass one another, let alone avoid bicycles or motorbikes. Motorbikes mainly used the no-man's land next to the paved road, and I followed suit. This was no easy ride as the no-man's land wasn't meant for vehicles and was, by then, potholed and muddy. I was in this mess and had to persevere. The continuous rain didn't make the ride any more manageable. Once, I stopped for coffee to get out of the rain and rest my wrists, but I still had a way to go and soon got back on the bike.



A new road was in the process of being constructed, which made the way one huge construction site. The hills I encountered at the end of the day left me gasping for air, but I pushed on, and five kilometres from Srae Amble, the weather came in again, and I pedalled like a woman possessed to reach the town before the storm broke.

I reached the town just as raindrops started falling and pulled into the nearest guest house. I was relieved to have made it but soon discovered it was a brothel (LOL). Not that I could have cared less, as I was far too tired to be concerned about that.

Srae Ambel - Koh Kong – by bus

I was optimistic about the new road leading to the border being completed but, unfortunately, that wasn't the reality. Despite my determination to continue, the mud clogged the chain and gears, forcing me to stop and clear the wheels. What a mess! Seeking advice on the road conditions ahead, I stopped at a roadside eatery, only to be informed that the road was impassable for a bicycle. Although I usually take such warnings lightly, I decided to heed the advice this time. I was directed to a bus, where I was surprised to find no seats, just an open space.

As we traversed the bumpy road, the driver and his companion were incredibly amiable, even buying me a coffee and offering water and a baguette. Initially told that the journey would take seven hours to cover 125 kilometres, I was relieved when we arrived in Koh Kong after just five hours. I paid the driver 50,000 riel for the ride, which I thought was a bargain. He seemed content with the payment and even offered me change, which made me chuckle.



Afterwards, I cycled around town searching for budget accommodation and found Rene's Pasta Bar & Guesthouse, which offered a fan room for only \$11. The room was sparkling clean, the staff helpful, and the food delicious. I couldn't be happier.

THAILAND (23)

Koh Kong - Pattaya

355 Kilometres - 4 Days

Koh Kong, Cambodia – Trat, Thailand – 100 km

I had a slow start to the morning. Every task seemed to drag on forever, and I even considered staying another day. However, since my bags were packed, I decided to cycle to the money exchange and convert my remaining Cambodian riel to Thai baht.

The distance to the Cambodia-Thailand border was only about 10 kilometres, but by the time I left the immigration office, it was already past 12. I felt completely drained and lacked the energy for the 90-kilometre ride to Trat.



The route to Trat was quite hilly, and my legs were not cooperating. Despite this, I persevered, knowing it was a beautiful ride on a well-maintained road. I entertained the idea of settling for a roadside motel, but I daydreamed so much that I suddenly realised I was only 30 kilometres away from Trat. Fifteen kilometres from Trat, the sky darkened, and someone jokingly shouted, "Rain is coming!" Before I knew it, it was dark and raining, and I couldn't help but think I must be crazy. However, at that point, I had no choice but to keep going. It was a nerve-racking experience.

Eventually, I arrived in Trat and had to walk the bike through the darkness and rain, searching for a guesthouse. Finally, I spotted one and knocked on the closed door. Being incredibly kind, the owner let a drenched farang (me and my bicycle) into his guesthouse. The room was available for just \$7, and I couldn't believe my luck. The room was quite colourful and my choice of clothing did help.

Trat – Chantaburi – 70 km

Even though this is usually a pleasant ride, I was not in the mood for cycling, but I knew it had to be done. Fortunately, the ride was short, and the weather was perfect, making biking easy. I chose a pleasant route through old hamlets and passed even older temples. I love these country lanes.

I arrived in Chanthaburi just as a few raindrops started falling and checked into the nearest hotel. The Muangchan Hotel is hidden but offers ground-floor rooms at 350 THB. I would have easily paid more to avoid carrying my panniers up a floor or two. Later, I strolled to the night market, always a fascinating affair, but it was virtually impossible to find vegetarian food.





เข้าข่ายการแวน

ตรวจวัดสายตา

ด้วยระบบคอมพิวเตอร์

คาเฟ่



ชัช นานาพิก
อม
พิก-แวนตา

ห้องของ
บอชิงเซ็ง
(สภ. 1)

วัดพระนายนพโยม
寺田福

วัดพระนายนพโยม
CHUA PHUOC



Chantaburi – Rayong - 115km

I didn't want to be back in Thailand and was not keen on the ride to Pattaya. Still, I thought it best to extend my non-immigrant visa as it's a pretty handy visa. It's not that this part of Thailand isn't interesting, it's just that I've cycled it too many times, and it's never nice to return to where you started just a few months ago.

Anyway, I reluctantly made my way in that direction and, after 115 kilometres, arrived in Rayong, where I cycled straight to Rich Grant Guesthouse. It's easily the cheapest accommodation in town and comes with washing machines, which is always a bonus. I've been here so many times, the owner gave me a discount on the room. LOL.



Rayong – Jomtien, Pattaya – 70 km

Instead of taking my usual coastal route, I took the main road and cycled (almost) nonstop to Jomtien. I arrived hungry because I didn't stop for food. I eventually found my key, which I had forgotten what I had done with.

Everything was exactly as I left it, except for a layer of dust, which didn't bother me too much. It was good to have a decent shower, coffee, and do the laundry. While hanging out the laundry, I heard someone call my name. Leo and Sammy were on their way to the Corner Bar, so I went downstairs to join them for a cold one.

Jomtien

I did nothing productive all day except watch the robot vacuum, sweep, and mop, LOL. However, I did walk across the road to the day market to stock up on eggs and potatoes, as putting eggs in a steamer and a potato in the microwave is pretty straightforward.

By late afternoon, I strolled to the beach, and it was a real privilege. I sat on the sand, scolding myself for feeling restless, when I should be grateful for the opportunity to have just completed a lovely circular route in Southeast Asia through three countries in eight leisurely weeks, covering 3,371 kilometres.



About this Book

This blog documents my ride through Cambodia en route from Laos to Thailand. There are numerous roads, and the route described in this blog is not necessarily the best. If you intend to use this blog as a guide for your own cycle tour, please bear in mind the following points:

The distances

Please note that the daily distances recorded in this blog may not always be the shortest route, as I occasionally deviate from the main path. However, the daily kilometres recorded were accurate according to my odometer.

Time of year and date

This blog accounts for my visits to Cambodia during October 2024. It's important to note that many things may have changed since then. The roads may have been improved or fallen into disrepair, the places I stayed in might have been upgraded or demolished.

Insurance

A travel insurance policy is essential to cover loss, theft, and medical expenses. However, some policies might not cover certain activities, such as scuba diving, motorcycling, and trekking. It's important to carefully read the policy to make sure it covers the activities you plan to do.

Clothing

During a cycling holiday, we spend most of our time riding bicycles, so having high-quality, padded cycling shorts is essential. You can wear any comfortable footwear while cycling, but I suggest sandals for more casual riders. Summers in Bulgaria and Turkey can be sweltering, but winters and higher elevation areas can be downright freezing, so pack accordingly. Don't forget to include personal toiletries such as insect repellent and anti-chafe cream. Lastly, I strongly recommend wearing a cycling helmet for safety purposes.

The bicycle and equipment

When it comes to choosing a bicycle for your needs, the most important thing is comfort. I use a mountain bike with a Merida frame equipped with Shimano Deore parts, Alex wheel rims, and Schwalbe tyres. To carry my belongings during the ride, I use Tubus bicycle racks and Ortlieb panniers, which can be a bit pricey, but are worth it in the long run. It's essential to know how to fix a punctured tube, and it's also convenient to have a phone holder on the handlebar for navigation purposes. I use Organic Maps or Google Maps for this. A handlebar bag is also a must-have for carrying a camera and other items you may need throughout the day.

Recommended further reading

Lonely Planet: The e-book is less expensive and a handy guide.



About Cambodia (Please refer to your favourite travel guidebook or the internet for a more in-depth overview)

Capital City

Phnom Penh is the capital of Cambodia and was once known as “The Pearl of Asia.”

Currency

Cambodia has a dual currency, the Cambodian Riel (r), and the US\$, which is widely accepted for larger purchases.

Language

Cambodia has a single official language: Khmer. Nearly 90% of the country's population speaks it. English is understood in larger touristy areas like Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

Religion

Buddhism is Cambodia's official religion. Approximately 97% of the country's population follows Theravada Buddhism, with Islam, Christianity, and tribal animism making up the bulk of the small remainder.

Location and size

Situated in the Southwestern corner of the Indochina Peninsula, Cambodia has an area of 181,040 sq km, extending 730 km Northeast to Southwest and 512 km Southeast to Northwest. It is bounded on the Northeast by Laos, on the West by Vietnam, on the Southwest by the Gulf of Thailand, and on the Western side by Thailand.

Population

Cambodia's current population is 16,458,385, and it is ranked 117th in terms of population density.

Internet coverage

Internet services are also widely available, particularly in town areas.

The Rule of the Khmer Rouge

Between 1975 and 1979, the Khmer Rouge controlled Cambodia with an extreme form of Maoism. In the process, more than 2,000,000 Cambodians were killed, leaving the country in economic and social ruin. Today, Cambodia is slowly rising from the ashes.



About the Author

Originally from Cape Town, South Africa, Leana was never much of a cyclist. Her passion for cycle touring started in 2005 when she participated in the Tour D'Afrique - a MTB race from Cairo to Cape Town. She bought a bicycle, flew to Cairo, and embarked on a journey that took her all the way to Cape Town. In the process, she became the first female to cycle all the way from Cairo to Cape Town. Upon returning, she found adjusting to her regular life surprisingly difficult and decided to continue her travels on two wheels.

In March 2007, Leana and her companion Ernest Markwood began a bike ride that turned into an around-the-world cycle ride. They started cycling together but eventually found their own pace and direction in life and on the road.

Leana has cycled across Africa twice, the Middle East, Europe, the UK, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Indian subcontinent, China, Southeast Asia, and Australia. After Australia, she flew to Ushuaia, Argentina, and cycled through South, Central, and North America for several years. She then visited many larger islands, including Cuba, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan.

As of now, Leana finds herself back in Southeast Asia.





ITALIAN MIXED PLATE
W/ BREAD
FORGET HOME
SMALL 12,000\$
LIG 15,000\$

ITALIAN MIXED PLATE
4 COLD CUTS
SMALL 12,000\$
LIG 15,000\$

FRESH BURRATA
+ CHERRY TOMATO
9.50\$

APERITIF COCKTAILS
SPRITZ 4.50
NEGRONI 4.50
REARDO 4.50
FROZEN 3.50
MARGHERITA
5 IN TONIC 3.00
CUBA LIBRE 3.00
MOJITO 3.00

ITALIAN SPIRITS
FRAPPA
MORO
BOUT
MONTAGRO
3.50\$

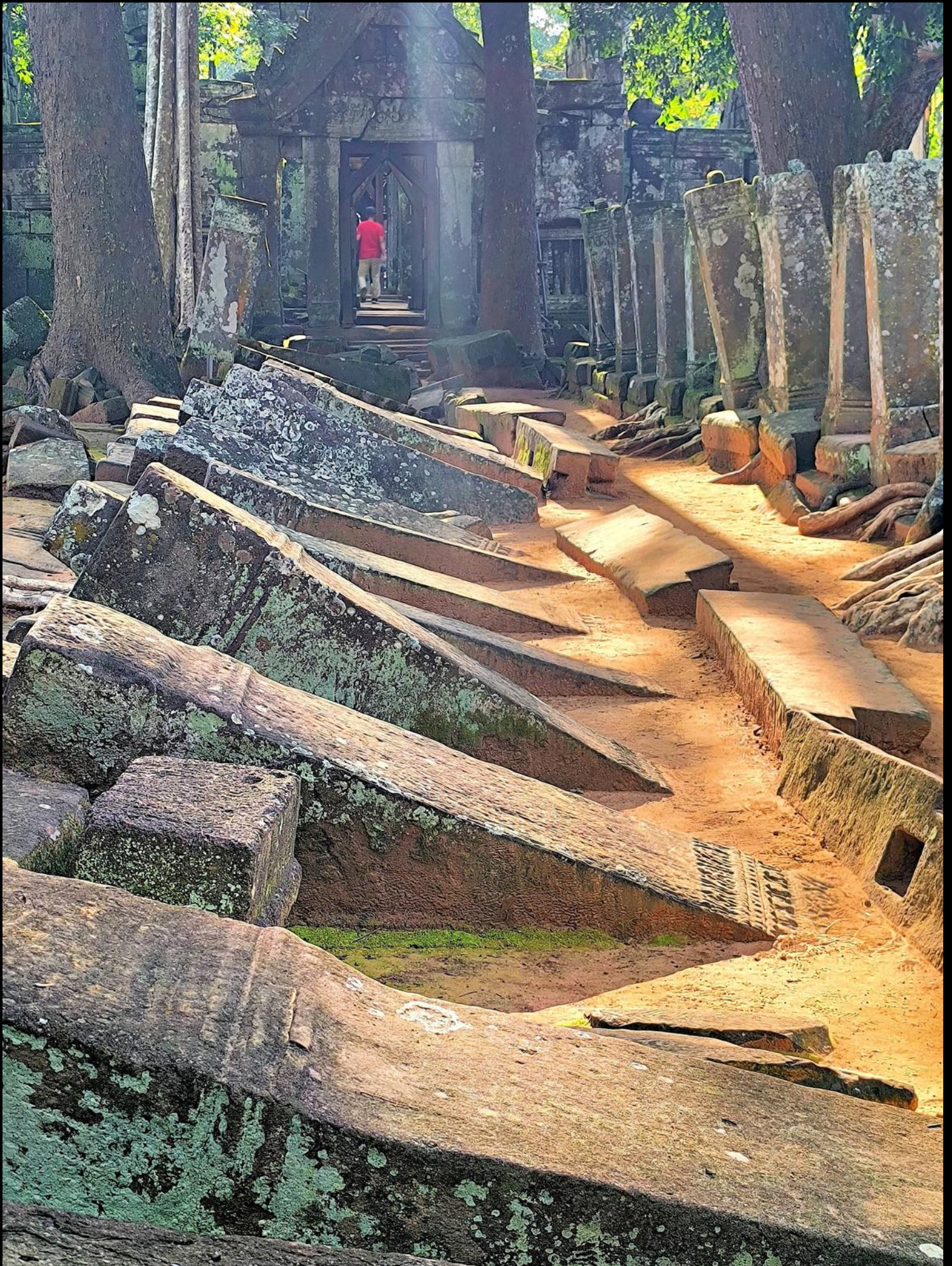
GRILLED CUT BEEF STRIPLOIN
15.00\$

L'osterie
RED TUNA CARPACCIO 15.00\$
GREEK SALAD 8.00\$
ROAST BEEF 1kg POTATOES SALAD
CHOCOLATE SAUSAGE TIRAMISU 50.00\$

RED WINE
15.00\$







It's not a race. It's a journey in which neither the distance cycled, nor the destination is of any importance.



