

Leana Niemand



Temples and Tailwinds: A Journey from Cambodia to Malaysia

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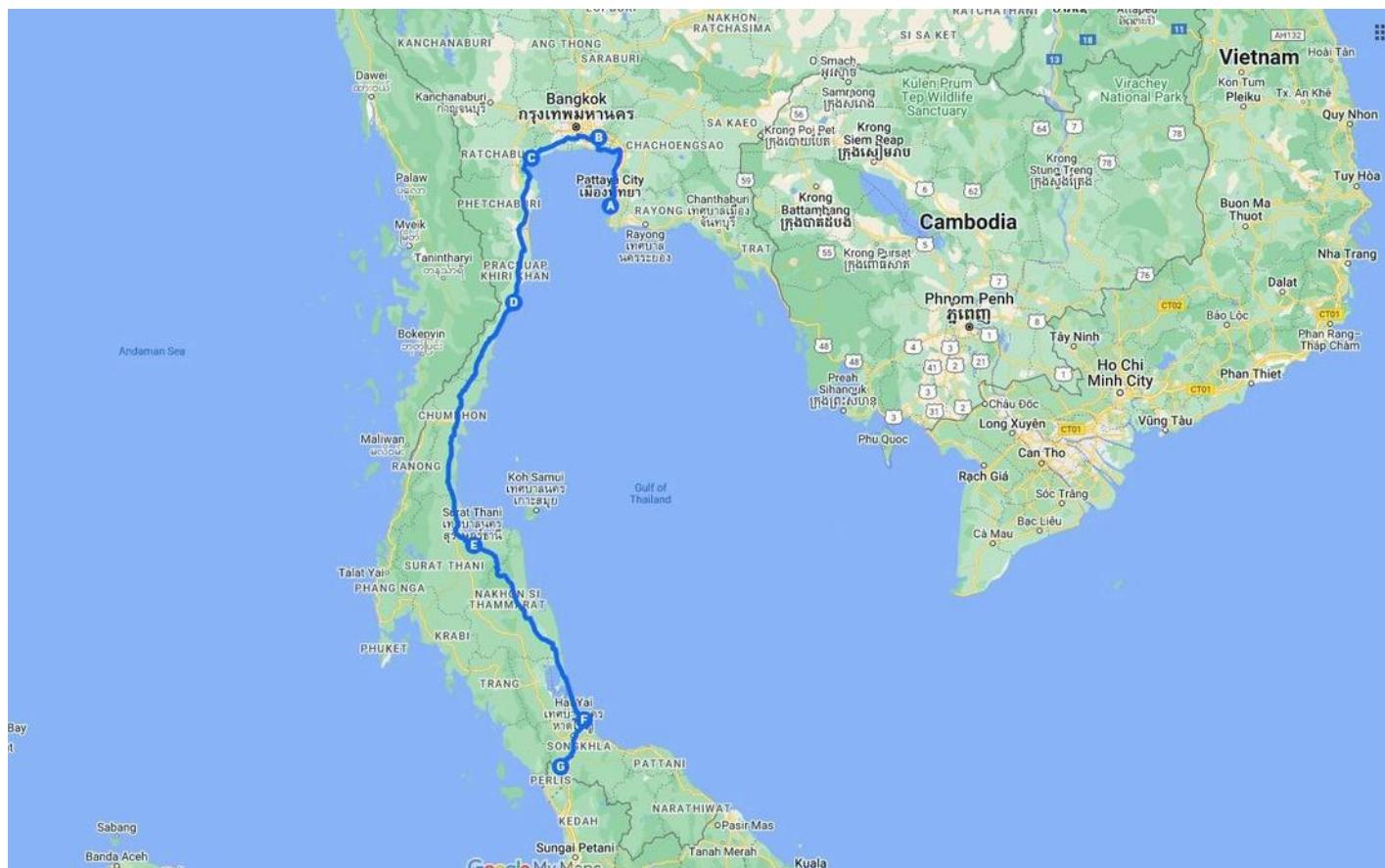
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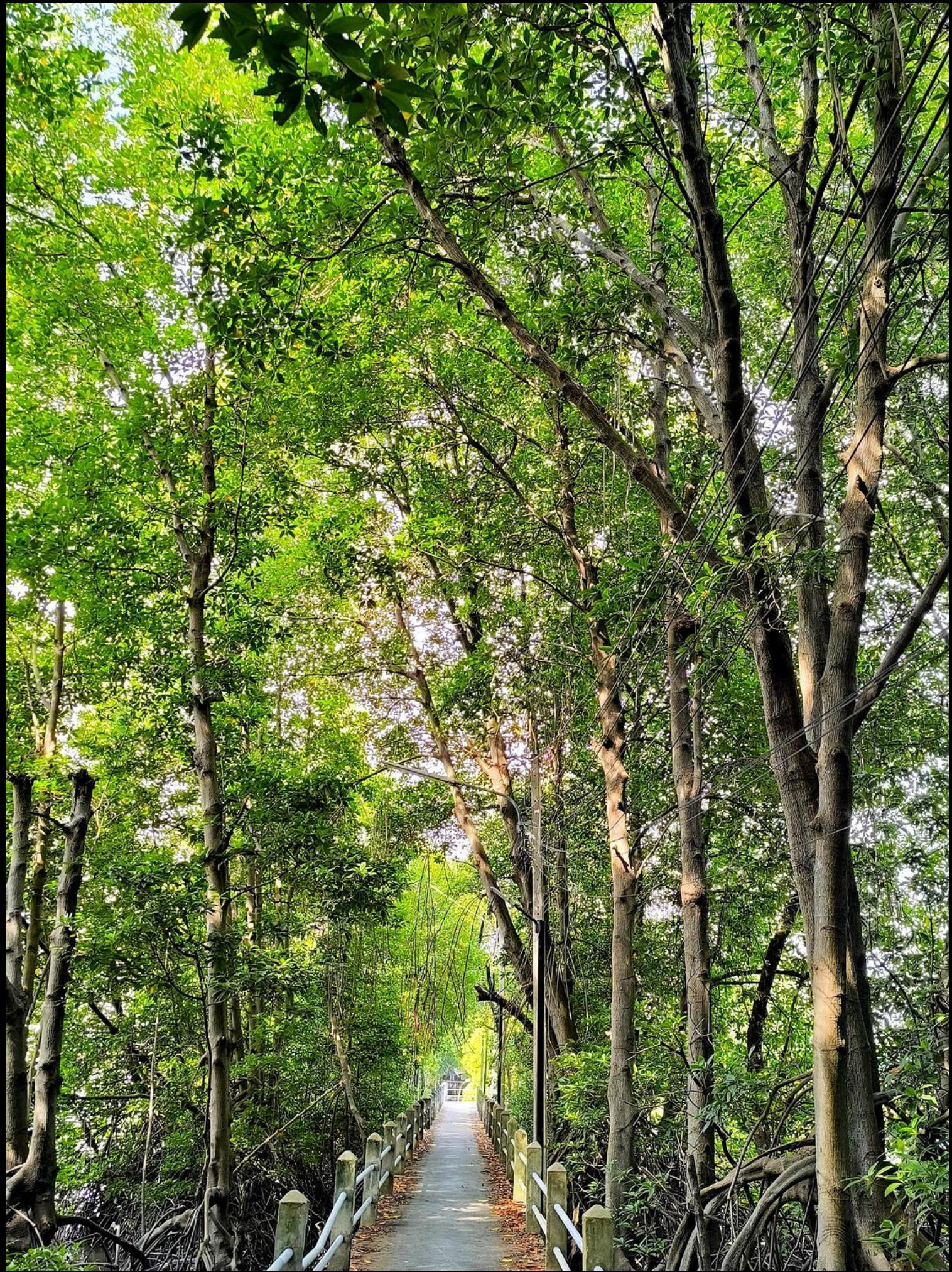
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Temples and Tailwinds: A Journey from Cambodia to Malaysia







Thank You

I am immensely grateful for the kindness of strangers and the random acts of generosity I encountered during my cycle tour of Thailand. It was truly a humbling experience.

My sister Amanda played a significant role in documenting my travels by keeping my journal entries and photos well-organised. Without her efforts, there would be no record of my journey.

I owe a great deal to my friend Val Abrahamse for managing my personal and financial matters back home while I travelled the world. Her conscientious efforts made it possible for me to pursue my dream.



Temples and Tailwinds: A Journey from Cambodia to Malaysia

Prologue

A journey never begins with movement. It begins with a quiet shift inside — a restlessness, a loosening, a whisper that says go.

I didn't set out to reinvent myself. I set out because the road steadies me, because solitude sharpens me, because the world feels more honest at the speed of a bicycle. There is a kind of faith in leaving alone — trusting that the road will hold you, that strangers will be kind, that your body will carry you farther than your doubts allow.

*So I began, not with certainty, but with willingness.
Not with a destination, but with the simple desire to move.*

The Border Where Rain Becomes a Country

Morning in Koh Kong held me the way a soft hand lingers on a shoulder — gently, insistently, as if asking me to stay. The room was too comfortable, the air too forgiving, and every small task stretched into a kind of slow ritual. But the bags were packed, and momentum — even reluctant momentum — has its own gravity. I strolled to the money exchange, watching the last of my Cambodian riel transform into Thai baht, the way one life quietly becomes another.



The border was only ten kilometres away, but borders are never measured in distance. They are measured in waiting rooms, in fluorescent lights, in the slow shuffle of passports across counters. By the time I stepped out of the immigration office, it was past noon, and the heat pressed down like a hand on my back. Ninety kilometres to Trat suddenly felt like a sentence rather than a plan.

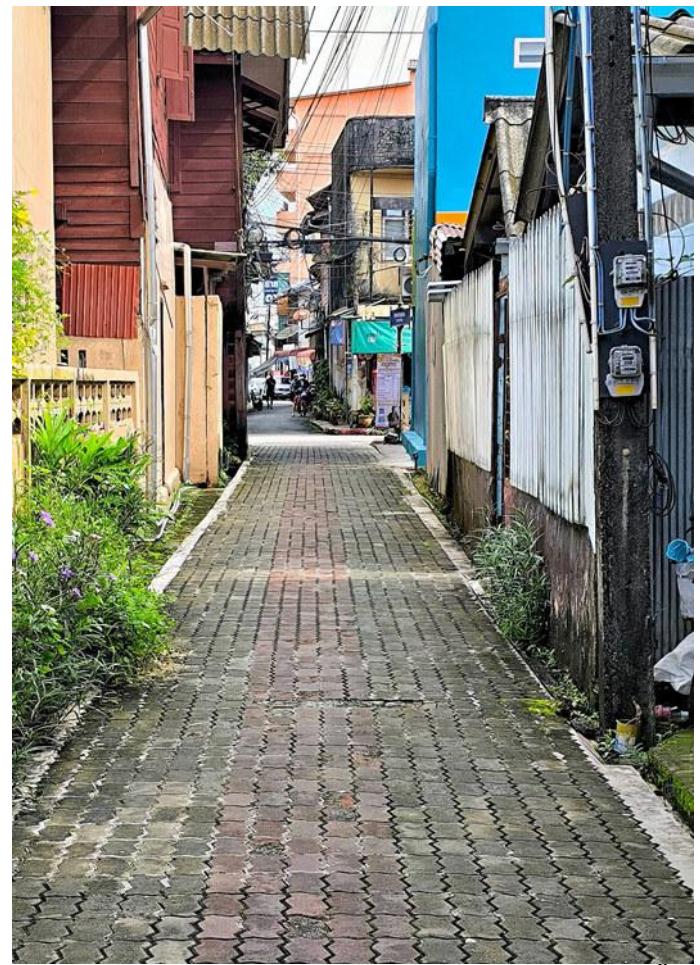
The road rose and fell in long, patient waves. My legs refused to cooperate, as if they too resented the idea of leaving Cambodia behind. Still, I pushed on — partly out of stubbornness, partly because the road itself was beautiful, a ribbon of smooth tarmac threading through green hills and quiet villages. I told myself I'd stop at a roadside motel, but my mind drifted, and when I looked up again, Trat was only thirty kilometres away. Daydreaming has its uses.

Fifteen kilometres from town, the sky shifted. A man on the roadside called out, half-teasing, "Rain is coming!" And then it did — not as a drizzle, but as a curtain. The world blurred into streaks of grey. Darkness arrived early. I cycled on, soaked and slightly delirious, the rain drumming against my cap like a warning I was too far in to heed.

By the time I reached Trat, I had to walk the bike through flooded streets, shoes squelching, hair plastered to my face. Guesthouses were shuttered, lights dimmed, and the town had already surrendered to night. I knocked on a closed door more out of hope than expectation.

A man opened it — kind eyes, a towel in hand — and ushered a drenched farang and her bicycle inside. Seven dollars for a room. Seven dollars for salvation. I could have kissed the floor.

I peeled off wet clothes, listened to the storm soften into a distant hiss, and lay on the thin mattress with the kind of gratitude that feels like prayer.



Temples That Remember What I Forget

I left Trat with the faint heaviness of *déjà vu*, the kind that settles in the chest when the road ahead is one you've ridden too many times. I wasn't in the mood for cycling, but the weather was gentle, and seventy kilometres felt like a distance I could negotiate with.

The route slipped through old hamlets where wooden houses leaned into the years, and temples rose quietly from the landscape — gold-tipped, patient. These country lanes always soothe me; they hold history without insisting on it.

By the time the first raindrops touched my arms, I was already entering Chanthaburi. I ducked into the Muangchan Hotel, grateful for a ground-floor room and the small mercy of not hauling panniers upstairs.

Later, I wandered the night market — a theatre of smoke, colour, and voices — though vegetarian food was elusive. Still, the market fed me in its own way: the scent of charcoal, the hum of conversation, the soft glow of lanterns warming the dusk.

Back in my room, the rain returned, tapping at the window like a reminder. The temples I'd passed lingered in my mind — their stillness, their endurance. They seemed to remember something I had forgotten: that even familiar roads can feel new when you let yourself be quiet inside them.







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The Road That Knows Me Too Well

I woke with a familiar reluctance, the kind that settles in when a road has been ridden too many times. Thailand stretched ahead of me like a chapter I'd already underlined, dog-eared, and read aloud. I wasn't eager to return to Pattaya, nor to the administrative chore of extending my visa, but the practicalities of long travel have their own gravity. So I set off, even if my spirit lagged behind.

The road to Rayong was long — 115 kilometres of *déjà vu* — but the weather was kind, and the traffic light enough to let my mind drift. I've cycled this stretch so often that the landscape feels like an old acquaintance: not unwelcome, but incapable of surprise. Still, the rhythm of pedalling has its own quiet mercy. Even a familiar road can soften the edges of a restless mind.

By late afternoon, Rayong appeared, its outskirts rising like a memory I hadn't asked to revisit. I rode straight to Rich Grant Guesthouse, the cheapest place in town and one of the few constants in my endlessly shifting life. The owner recognised me immediately — a small, amused smile, a discount offered without ceremony. I suppose there's comfort in being known, even in a place you never meant to return to.

The washing machines hummed in the courtyard, a domestic soundtrack to a transient life. I showered, stretched my legs, and let the day fall away. Nothing remarkable had happened, yet the simple act of arriving felt like a quiet victory in itself.



Dust, Keys, and the Familiar Weight of Return

I left Rayong with the kind of determination that isn't born of enthusiasm but of inevitability. The coastal road, usually my companion, didn't call to me this time. I took the main road instead — a straight, unromantic line toward a place I knew too well.

The kilometres slipped by in a kind of trance. I barely stopped, barely ate, barely allowed myself to feel anything beyond the steady churn of pedals beneath me. Hunger arrived late, sharp and insistent, but by then Jomtien was already rising ahead of me like a memory I hadn't asked to revisit.

I found my key only after rummaging through pockets and panniers, surprised at how easily one can forget the small anchors of a life left behind. The room greeted me exactly as I had abandoned it months before — everything in its place, except for the thin film of dust that had settled like a quiet accusation. I didn't mind. Dust is just time made visible.

A shower washed the road from my skin. Coffee steadied me. A cold beer softened the edges of the day. While hanging laundry on the balcony, I heard my name float up from the street — Leo and Sammy, heading to the Corner Bar. Their voices were a reminder that even in places I return to reluctantly, there are threads of familiarity that tug me back into the world.

I joined them for a drink, the evening unfolding with the easy rhythm of old routines. Nothing extraordinary happened, yet the simple act of sitting among friends felt like a small, necessary exhale.



A Quiet Day Beside a Restless Sea

I did almost nothing, and somehow that felt like both a luxury and a confession. I watched the robot vacuum trace its slow, determined path across the floor. It swept. It mopped. I walked to the day market for eggs and potatoes — the simplest of provisions for the simplest of meals. A steamer for the eggs, a microwave for the potato. Life reduced to its most functional form.

By late afternoon, I wandered to the beach. The sea was calm, the sand warm beneath me, the horizon a soft blur. I sat there, restless for no good reason, scolding myself gently for the ingratitude of it. Eight weeks, three countries, 3,371 kilometres — a circle drawn in sweat and wonder — and still my mind fidgeted like a child.

But gratitude has its own quiet tide. It comes in slowly, then all at once. Sitting there, watching the light shift across the water, I felt it settle in me again — the privilege of movement, the privilege of return, the privilege of being able to choose the next road.

Tomorrow, I will leave again. Today, I let the sea remind me how to be still.



The Pump That Delayed a Departure

Jomtien had a way of softening time. Days slipped past like warm tidewater, dissolving into one another until I could no longer tell preparation from procrastination. The beach murmured its steady lullaby, the markets breathed their evening perfume of frying garlic and charcoal smoke, and my bicycle — newly serviced, gleaming with fresh cogs and chain — waited like a horse at the gate.

But the pump, absurdly, betrayed me.

I reached for it that morning with the casual confidence of someone who believes the universe is mostly cooperative. Instead, it lay limp and useless in my hands, a small failure that felt disproportionately personal. My panniers were already packed, lined up by the door like obedient soldiers, and yet I was grounded by a single broken tool.

The local bike shop offered sympathy but no solution. They promised to check a warehouse, a phrase that sounded suspiciously like a gentle dismissal. So I ordered a pump online and resigned myself to living out of my panniers for a few more days — a strange limbo, half-departed, half-rooted.

I told myself I would leave on the ninth, pump or no pump. A vow made not to the road, but to my own restless spirit. Adventure, after all, rarely waits for perfect conditions.



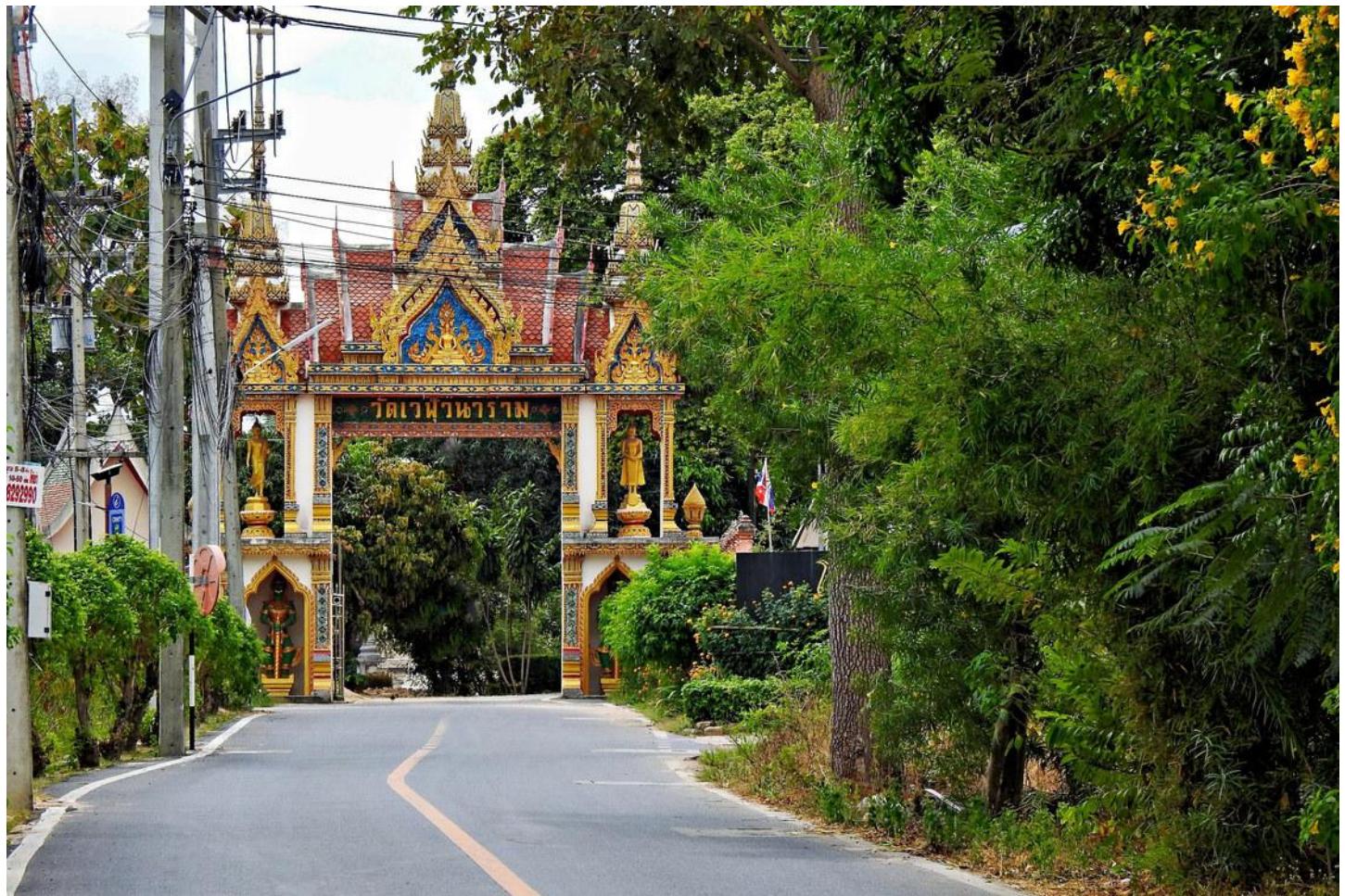
Tailwinds and the First Hint of South

The pump arrived early, as if embarrassed by the fuss it had caused. I repacked my panniers with the urgency of someone afraid the universe might change its mind. Then I rolled out of Jomtien, the familiar streets slipping behind me like a skin I no longer needed.

The rural roads south of the city were gentle, winding through farmland where the air smelled of earth and green things. The freedom of movement returned quickly — that lightness in the chest, that quiet hum beneath the ribs. But fitness, I discovered, is a fickle companion. Even seventy kilometres felt longer than memory suggested.

Bang Saen greeted me with sunbathers and weekend crowds, the beach alive with colour and noise. Prices had doubled, inflated by demand, but I found a modest twelve-dollar room — ground floor, easy access, a mattress long past its prime. Comfort is relative on the road; convenience often wins.

I slept lightly, listening to the muffled sounds of holidaymakers drifting through the night, already feeling the pull of the next day's ride.



A Road Suspended Over the Sea

Morning arrived grey, and the wind-brushed, the kind of sky that makes you hesitate at the door. I left late, reluctant but determined, and soon found myself on a road built over the ocean — a narrow ribbon of concrete suspended above shifting water. For twenty kilometres, the world felt pared down to sea, sky, and the steady rhythm of my wheels.

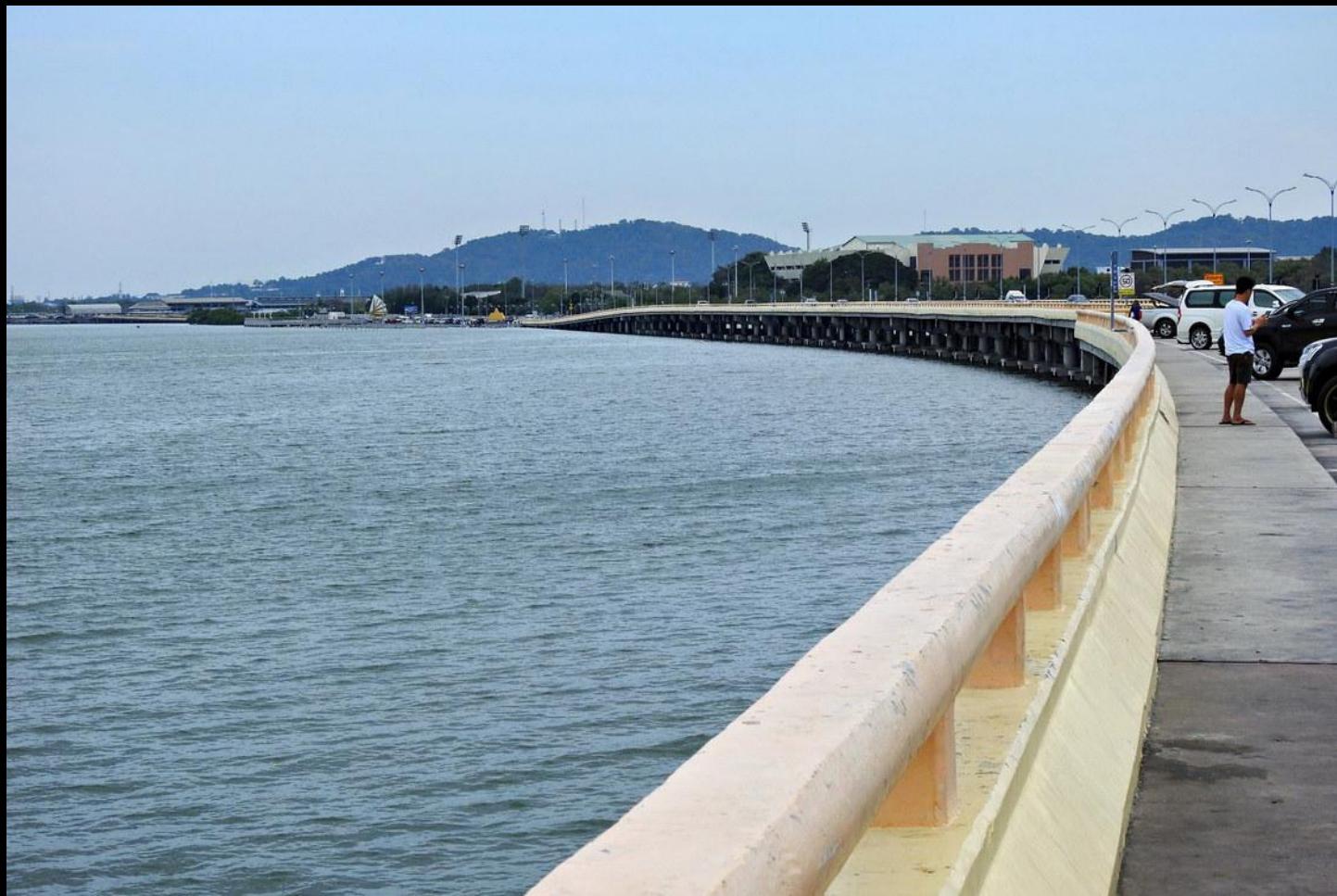
Then the spell broke.

The highway swallowed me, its lanes wide and impatient. Construction sites narrowed the shoulders, trucks exhaled hot diesel breath, and the city's sprawl began its slow, inevitable creep. Rounding the northern tip of the Gulf of Thailand is never pleasant; Bangkok stretches its influence like a tide, swallowing villages, fields, and silence.

By the time I reached Samut Prakan, I had no desire to continue. Budget rooms were scarce, so I surrendered to a pricier option, grateful simply to stop moving.

Hunger hit me with sudden ferocity. I nearly accosted a fellow guest returning from the market, begging directions. The market itself was a riot of abundance — fruit piled like jewels, steaming pots, skewers sizzling over open flames. I returned to my room with far more food than one person could reasonably eat, a small feast earned by endurance.

Outside, the city pulsed. Inside, I let exhaustion settle into my bones.



Floodplains Where Water Teaches Patience

To escape the chaos of Rama 2 Road, I took a ferry across the Chao Phraya — a crossing made possible only by the kindness of strangers who helped lift my bicycle aboard. On the far bank, the world softened again. I zig-zagged through narrow paths, detoured to a dolphin-watching point where no dolphins appeared, and drifted through wetlands alive with birds.

This region is a vast floodplain, a place shaped not by land but by water. Canals thread through salt farms and fishing villages, and the people here live with the rhythm of tides and monsoons, accepting the inevitability of floods the way others accept seasons. It felt ancient, practical, and strangely serene.

By the time I reached Samut Songkhram, eighty-odd kilometres later, the Bangkok sprawl had finally loosened its grip. I checked into a room, my nose running, my body tired. The next day, I rested, letting the quiet seep back into me.







Bird Roads and the Long Breath of the Gulf

I woke with a surprising lightness, as if the rest day had rinsed something clean inside me. Maybe it was the food — Samut Songkhram's night market is a kind of edible cathedral — or maybe it was simply the relief of having escaped Bangkok's sprawl. Either way, my legs felt willing again.

A short ferry ride carried me across the river, and suddenly the world softened into rural quiet. The road slipped beneath the Rama 2 freeway, then opened into a landscape of mangroves and salt farms, the air sharp with brine. I detoured briefly to look for the swimming monkeys, but the trees were empty, the water still. Some creatures appear only when they choose to.

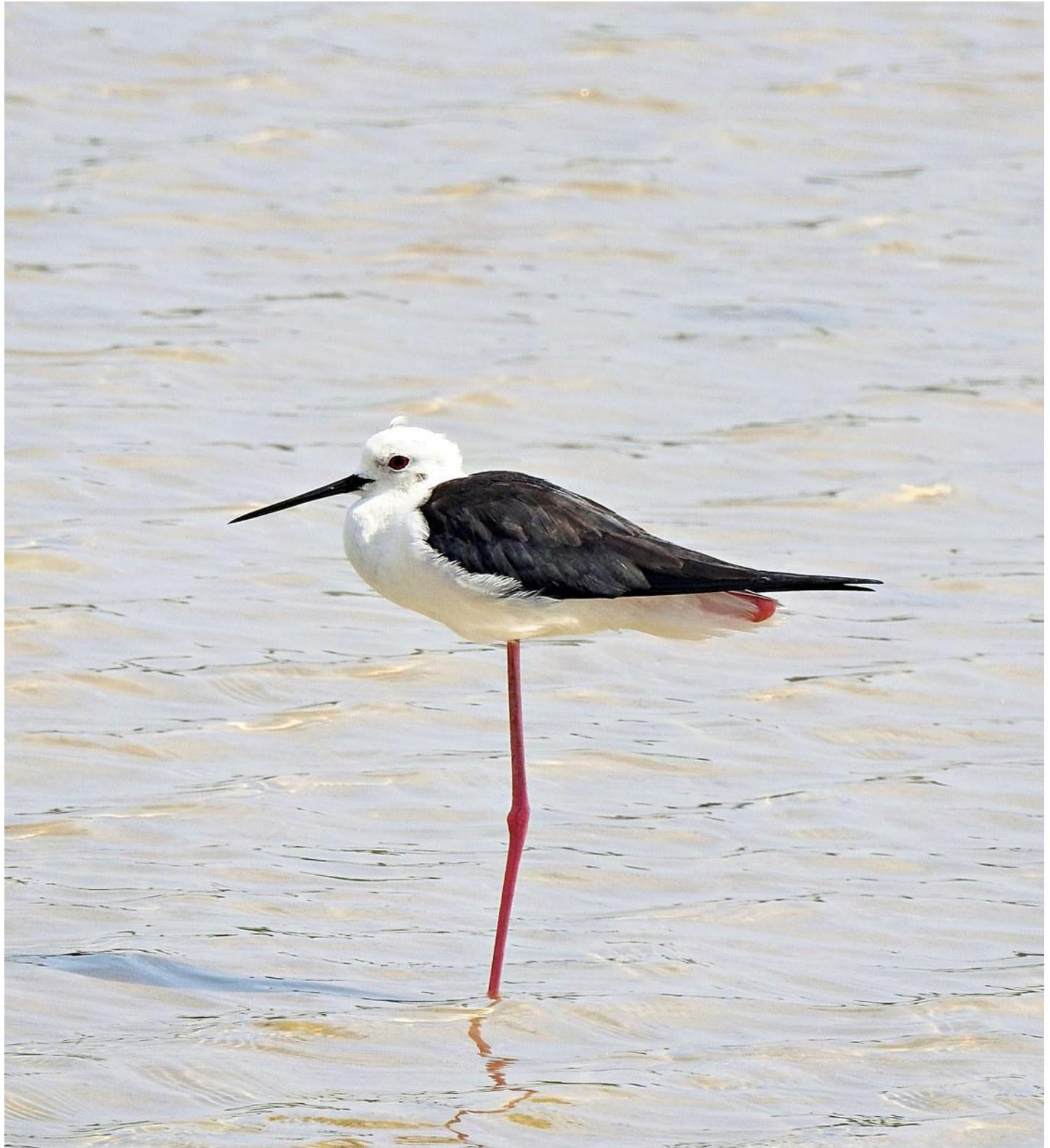
For once, I met another woman cyclist — a rarity on these roads. She was from the UK, escaping winter, riding south with the same quiet determination I recognised in myself. We chatted briefly, then drifted apart, each settling into our own rhythm.

A stiff tailwind pushed me along the Gulf, past Phetchaburi, past the vast salt flats shimmering like mirrors. These wetlands are a highway for migrating birds, and I scanned the horizon for the tiny spoon-billed sandpiper, that elusive slip of a creature. But the sky was empty today, the birds already elsewhere.

Most of the way unfolded on cycle paths or dedicated lanes — a rare luxury in Southeast Asia — and by mid-afternoon, I rolled into Cha-Am. Hunger arrived before curiosity, so I didn't wait for the night market. A street vendor fed me quickly and without ceremony, the way the road often does.



The day had been easy, almost generous. Sometimes the Gulf breathes with you. Sometimes it carries you farther than you expect.





A Tent Between Wind and the Whispering Sea

The road south from Cha-Am is one of my favourites — a long, quiet ribbon that clings to the coastline, offering glimpses of sea and sky that feel almost too beautiful to be real. Add a tailwind, and the whole world seems to tilt in your favour.

I flew through Hua Hin without stopping, the city blurring into colour and noise. The cycle path carried me for a while, then I veered toward Pranburi, where the landscape softened into coconut groves and quiet villages. By the time I reached Sam Roi Yot, the limestone mountains rose like ancient guardians, their silhouettes jagged against the sky.

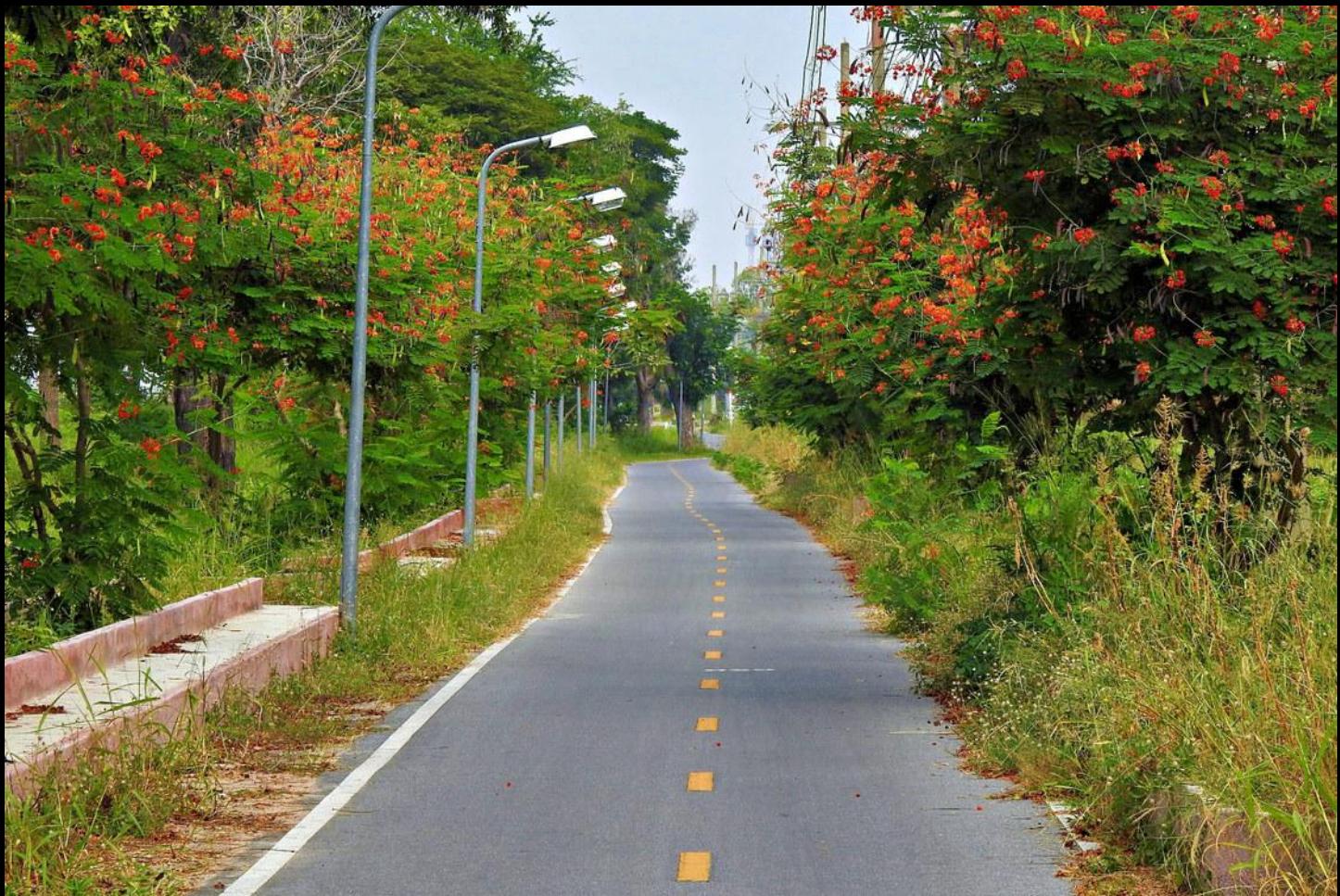
Ninety kilometres in, I entered Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park and headed straight for the Sam Phraya Beach campsite. The wind was sharp at first, tugging at the tent, but it soon calmed into a steady whisper. The ants, however, were relentless — tiny, determined creatures that drove me three kilometres to a shop in search of a deterrent. Esther would have laughed at my battle with the “wee buggers.”

As evening settled, I walked the deserted beach, the sand cool beneath my feet. I realised, with a kind of quiet astonishment, how little I needed: food, water, a tent, a sleeping mat, clean ablutions. The essentials of a life pared down to its bones.

The restaurant stayed open just long enough to serve me a bowl of fried rice. I ate it slowly, listening to the sea breathing in the dark.

Some nights remind you that simplicity is not deprivation.

It is freedom.







Rain, Refuge, and the Warmth of Strangers

I woke to a soft drizzle, the kind that whispers rather than warns. I packed quickly, hoping to outrun the weather, but the drizzle thickened into something heavier. Rain has a way of insisting on its own pace.

I pushed hard toward Prachuap, grateful that it was only fifty kilometres away. By the time I reached Maggie's Homestay, I was damp, tired, and ready to stop. Maggie's is one of those rare places where the welcome feels immediate — warm, unpretentious, familiar.

UK-John had been there for over a year. USA-Mike had drifted in from Indonesia and seemed to have rooted himself comfortably. Darren, the Australian surfer, lived in Sumatra but was passing through. The place felt like a crossroads of wandering souls, each carrying their own stories, each content to share them over tea or beer.

I paid for two nights, did my laundry, and surrendered to the easy companionship of strangers who, for a moment, felt like friends. The next day, I did nothing — absolutely nothing — except talk. I hadn't spoken that much in months. It felt indulgent, almost decadent, to let words spill so freely.

Some stops are practical. Some become small sanctuaries. This one was both.



Waves, Wind, and the Cyclist Who Would Not Pass

I nearly stayed another day at Maggie's. The place had that gravitational pull certain refuges possess — a softness, a warmth, a sense that time could stretch indefinitely without consequence. Everyone else seemed to be extending their stay, drifting deeper into the comfort of familiar faces and easy conversation. But the wind was still blowing from the northeast, and tailwinds are not to be wasted. I left before I could talk myself out of it.

The sea was wilder than the day before. Waves hurled themselves over the promenade, spilling onto the road in white, frothing sheets. I veered inland, choosing safety over spectacle, though the ocean's roar followed me for kilometres.

With the wind at my back, the kilometres unfurled effortlessly. The road curved toward a small national park, forcing me briefly onto the highway — wide shoulder, light traffic, a corridor of asphalt that felt almost gentle. A local cyclist caught up to me, exchanged a few words, then drifted ahead. But he didn't stay ahead. He waited. And waited again. His presence lingered too close, too attentive, unsettling in a way I couldn't quite name.

I turned into the national park to give him space. When I rejoined the road, he was still there. I stopped to let him pass; he slowed. His backward glances tightened something in my chest. Instinct is a quiet, insistent thing. I listened to it. I returned to the highway and stayed there until the turnoff to Bang Krut.







In Bang Krut, I found a patch of shade and drank water while chatting with a friendly Canadian — the kind of easy, fleeting encounter that restores your faith in strangers. Then I continued south, the wind still pushing, the sea still restless.

By the time I reached Bang Saphan, a hundred kilometres down the coast, I was ready to stop. I had hoped to camp in the national park, but a fallen tree had crushed tents the night before, and the campsite was closed. So I settled for a room in town — four walls, a bed, a door that locked. After the strange tension of the day, it felt like enough.

Some days, the road gives you beauty. Some days it gives you a warning.

Today, it gave me both.



The Royal Road and the Quiet Work of Waiting

I left late, unhurried, letting the morning stretch itself out before me. The tailwind was still there, steady and loyal, and the Royal Coastal Road unfolded like a long exhale. This stretch of Thailand is a kind of quiet paradise — coconut groves, fishing villages painted in sun-bleached colours, Buddha statues watching over the road with serene indifference.

I drifted between the main route and smaller rural lanes, following whatever path felt most alive. The wind carried me across wide rivers and past boats pulled onto shore like sleeping animals. The world felt generous, open, uncomplicated.

After about 110 kilometres, I reached Wua Laen Beach and found a simple hut for 350 baht — the kind of place where time slows, and the sea becomes your only clock. I stayed two days, tending to small tasks, letting the wind and waves do their quiet work on my mind.

Eventually, practicality nudged me onward. I moved into Chumphon town, where errands awaited — documents to sign, a retainer to replace, logistics that tethered me briefly to the ordinary world. I booked a room for a few days, then a few more. The dentist worked slowly; the city moved at its own pace.

There isn't much to do in Chumphon except wander the night market or take a motorbike taxi to the Lotus mall.

Waiting is its own kind of journey.

Sometimes the road pauses so you can catch up to yourself.







Banana Groves and the Sea's Unfinished Anger

I left Chumphon without the retainer I'd been waiting for. No message, no update. Irritation simmered beneath the surface, but the road — as it often does — softened it.

The tailwind returned, steady and warm. I drifted through banana groves, coconut plantations, and oil palm fields, the landscape shifting between inland quiet and sudden glimpses of the sea. The ocean was still angry from the storm — waves heaving, debris scattered across the sand like the aftermath of an argument.

After eighty kilometres, I reached Fisherman's Bungalows, perched right on the beach. My hut was small, rickety, almost fragile in the face of the wind, but its imperfection felt honest. I bought snacks from a nearby shop and sat on the veranda, watching the waves hurl themselves at the shore.

The sea was restless, unfinished, full of its own wild language. I listened until the light faded.







A Christmas Ride into the Ordinary City

I left late, easing my bicycle out of the cramped little bungalow as if coaxing a reluctant animal from its shelter. The storm had passed, but its breath still lingered in the air — a faint salt-sharpness, a restless undertow in the waves. The road, however, was gentle. Another superb day along this stretch of coast, where the world feels wide and uncomplicated.

Cycle touring rarely gets better than this: a tailwind at your back, the sea appearing and disappearing beside you like a companion with its own moods, the road unspooling in long, forgiving lines. I stopped often, not out of fatigue but out of wonder — small pauses to let the landscape settle into me.

By the time I reached Surat Thani, the sun was already low, the light turning the city gold at the edges. One hundred and twenty-three kilometres behind me, I rolled straight to My Place Hotel, hoping for one of their budget rooms. They were all taken. I paid more than I wanted to, unwilling to drag my panniers up four flights of stairs elsewhere. Sometimes practicality wins over thrift.

The next day unfolded slowly. Surat Thani is a typical Thai city — modern and traditional in the same breath. I wandered its streets, watching fishmongers, rice sellers, and vendors of temple paraphernalia coexist in a kind of effortless choreography. Christmas passed without ceremony, absorbed into the ordinary rhythm of the place.

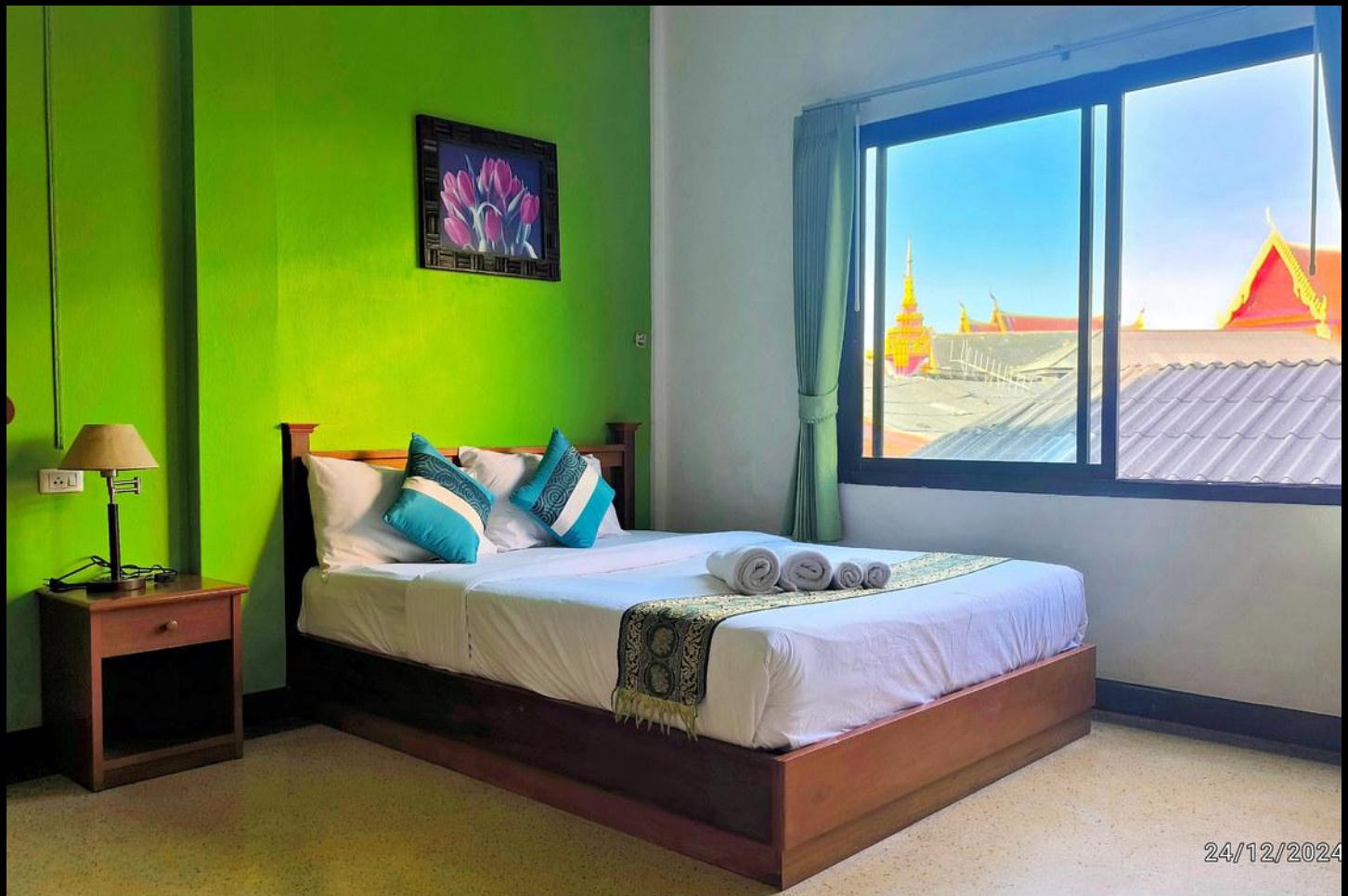
Some cities dazzle.

Some cities overwhelm. Surat Thani simply lets you be.











Valentine on the Road to Somewhere Else

I considered following the coast, but the wind was unsettled, the sky undecided. Inland felt easier — a main road, a wide shoulder, a tailwind that made the kilometres glide beneath me. It wasn't the most interesting route, but sometimes ease is its own kind of beauty.

The day's gift arrived in the form of Valentine, a young Russian cyclist heading toward Kuala Lumpur to catch a flight to India. We rode side by side for a while, talking in the easy, unguarded way travellers often do — two strangers sharing a road, a pace, a moment in time. Then our paths diverged, as they always do.

Rain began shortly after we parted. I reached Tha Sala just as the sky opened fully, and when I saw a ten-dollar room along the main road, I didn't hesitate. The rain hammered the roof, the air smelled of wet earth and diesel, and I felt grateful for the simple shelter.

Some encounters last only a few kilometres. But they stay with you longer than you expect.



Shadow Puppets in a Rain-Washed Town

I left under a grey sky, the kind that promises rain without committing to it. The ride was comfortable despite the intermittent downpours — warm rain, soft rain, the kind that feels more like a presence than a nuisance.

Valentine had warned me of heavy storms in the forecast, and though the rain never became truly fierce, it was enough to convince me to stop early in Nakhon Si Thammarat. Perhaps I overreacted. Perhaps I simply needed a pause.

The town offered little in the way of spectacle, but I wandered anyway — along the remnants of the old city wall, past the white City Pillar Shrine, through Sanam Na Muang Park. The air smelled of wet stone and frangipani.

Nakhon Si Thammarat is known for its shadow puppets, and at last I learned the meaning of the black statues with red fingers I'd seen along the road. Characters from an ancient performance tradition, their gestures frozen mid-story. I also discovered that folk medicine still thrives here — herbs, roots, rituals passed down quietly through generations.

Rain or shine, I knew I would move on the next day.

But the town left a small imprint, like a thumb pressed into soft clay.







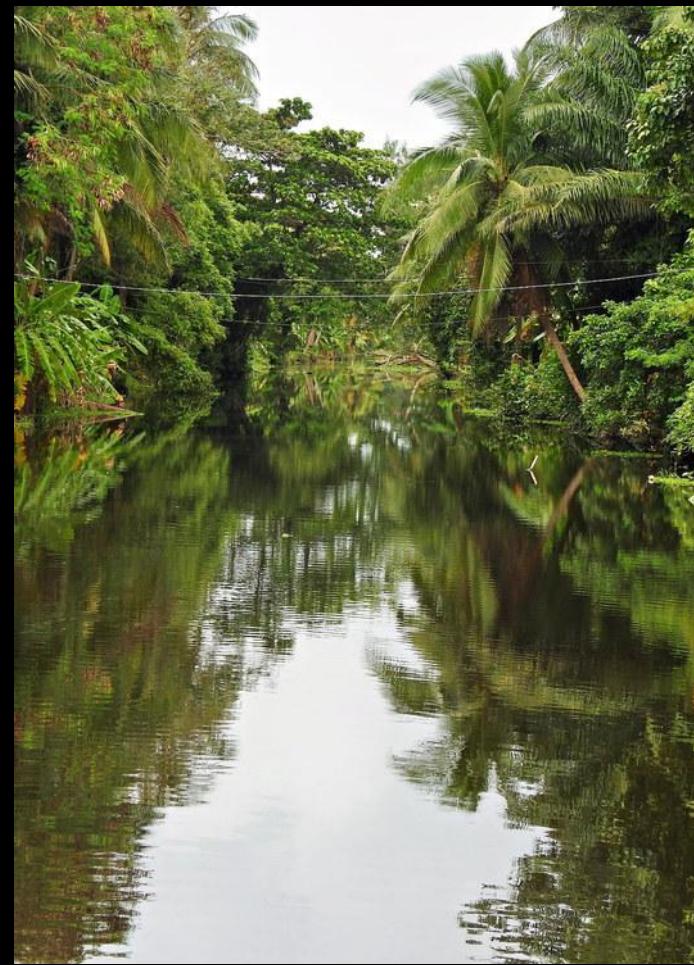
Wind Turbines Turning the Sky

I left Nakhon Si Thammarat under a sky still bruised from the previous day's rain. The air was cool, washed clean, carrying the faint scent of wet earth and coconut husk. The road slipped quickly into familiar terrain — long stretches of coconut palm plantations, their fronds swaying like slow metronomes marking the rhythm of the morning.

Despite the lingering drizzle, the ride felt easy. The landscape opened and closed around me, alternating between quiet inland lanes and sudden glimpses of the sea. When the coastline finally revealed itself fully, the wind turbines appeared — enormous white giants turning with a kind of solemn grace. Their blades carved slow arcs through the sky, each rotation a reminder of how small and temporary we are in the face of such engineered stillness.

The wind wasn't as generous as on previous days, but the road remained kind. By midday, the clouds thinned, and the light softened into something almost tender. I rode through it quietly, letting the kilometres pass without urgency.

Around four o'clock, the weather shifted again — a darkening at the edges, a heaviness in the air. I stopped at the Cheewaport Resort; a cluster of bungalows tucked along a sandy track beside the ocean. The price was higher than I wanted, but the sky was threatening, and my body was ready to stop.



The bungalow was spacious, clean, unexpectedly comfortable. When the owner offered to send someone to the shop for snacks and beer, I agreed without hesitation. My rubber arm, as always, bent easily.

I sat on the veranda as the evening gathered, listening to the sea mutter to itself. The wind turbines turned slowly in the distance, steady and unbothered, as if they alone understood the language of the sky.

Some days are defined by effort. Some by beauty. And some — like this one — by the quiet machinery of the world turning around you.





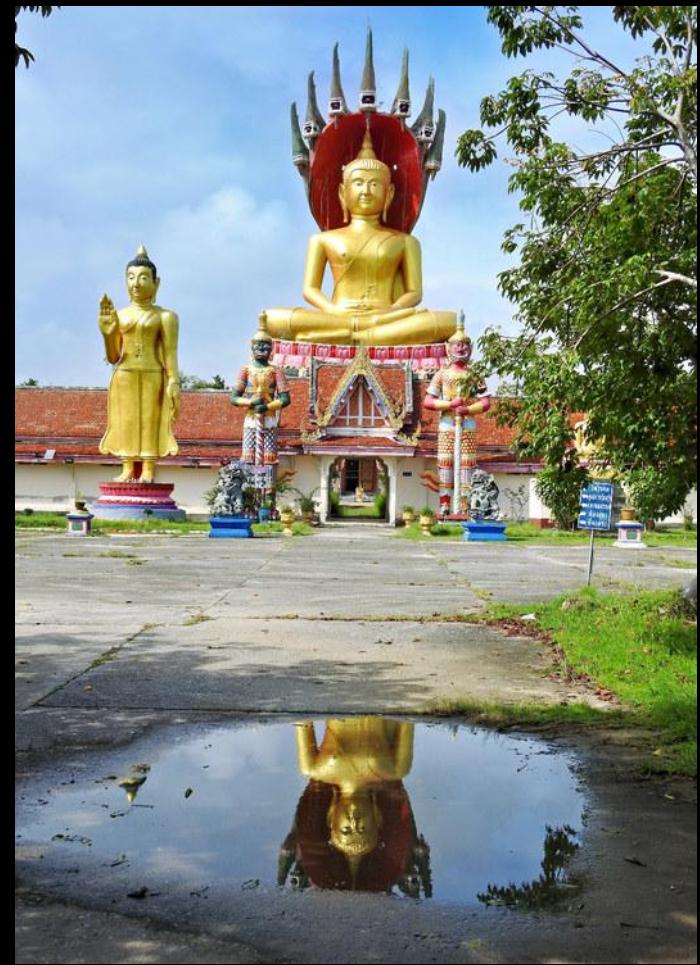
History Written in Salt and Stone

The wind was already awake when I set out, stirring the sea into a restless churn. I considered following the coastal road, but the crosswind was sharp, almost spiteful, so I turned inland toward the main road — a more sheltered, if less poetic, choice.

I didn't stop often. Not out of haste, but because the weather pressed against me like a hand urging me forward. Still, the landscape offered its own quiet revelations. Temples appeared along the roadside — old, weathered, their walls holding centuries of stories. Further on, the remains of an ancient city emerged, stones half-claimed by moss and time. Then a Dutch cemetery, unexpected and strangely moving, a reminder of how many nations have passed through this region in search of something — spices, trade, power, belonging.

As I neared Songkhla, I found a small ferry crossing the mouth of the lake. It saved me ten or fifteen kilometres of highway, but more than that, it offered a moment of stillness — the bicycle resting beside me, the water dark and wide, the wind briefly softened.

Songkhla welcomed me with its old town — narrow streets, colourful facades, a sense of history that felt both lived-in and lovingly preserved. I checked into an affordable hotel without bothering to search for anything cheaper. The location was perfect, and I was tired of the day's negotiations with weather and wind.

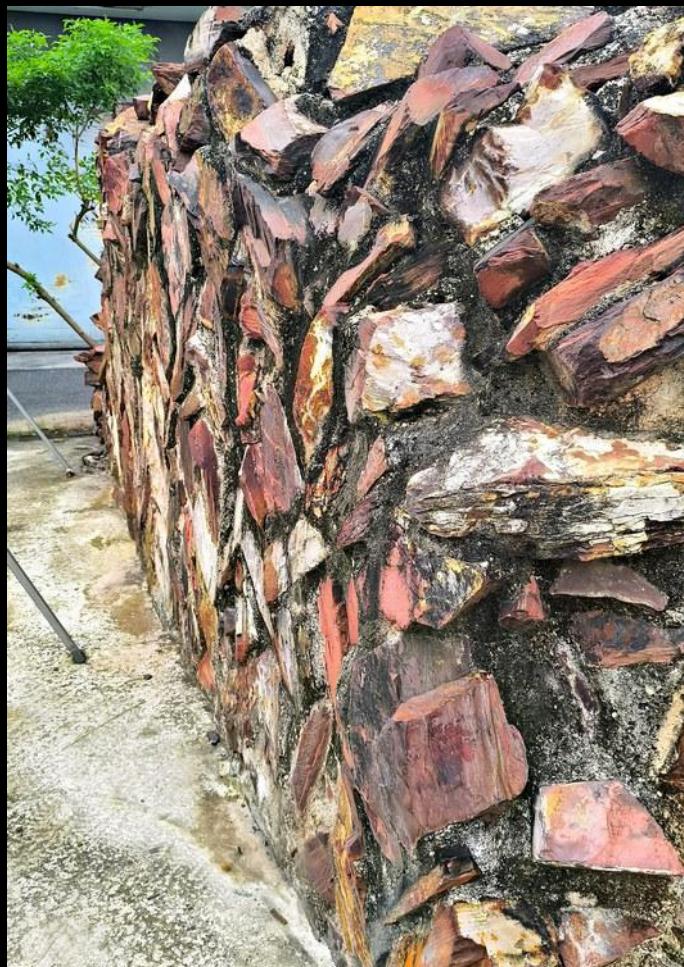


I wandered the old city, surrounded by Thai tourists with cameras slung around their necks. I felt like the only foreigner in the crowd, a quiet observer drifting through their holiday snapshots. Songkhla's history stretches back to the 10th century, its roots intertwined with trade routes that reached as far as Quanzhou. You can feel that depth in the stones, in the air, in the way the city holds itself.

Later, I took a motorbike taxi to the mall — always a slightly terrifying experience — and found it bustling with families preparing for the New Year. Hijab-wearing women pushed trolleys overflowing with food, and I felt a sudden, vivid memory of Malay kitchens in Cape Town, the scent of samosas and spice drifting through the air.

I was close to Malaysia now. Close enough to taste it.









Crossing Into a New Year and a New Country

I left Songkhla beneath a high, bright sun, the kind that makes the world feel sharper at the edges. The old town slipped behind me in a blur of colour — murals, narrow lanes, the soft echo of yesterday's footsteps — and soon I was riding along the shores of Lake Songkhla, the water wide and unmoving, as if holding its breath.

Hat Yai rose ahead, busy and sprawling, but I skirted its edges, choosing quieter secondary roads that threaded through villages and fields. The air smelled of rice husk and damp earth. I had planned to stop near the border, to cross in the morning with a clear head and rested legs. But plans, I've learned, are fragile things. They dissolve the moment the road whispers otherwise.

And today, the road whispered.

Before I knew it, I was at the immigration complex, a maze of signs and counters and half-understood instructions. I bought travel insurance for the next two months — a bureaucratic ritual that felt oddly ceremonial, like lighting a candle before entering a temple. Then I was stamped out of Thailand, stamped into Malaysia, and just like that, a line on a map became a shift in the air.

The differences announced themselves immediately. Buddhist temples gave way to mosques, their domes rising like quiet moons above the rooftops. Women moved through the streets in flowing hijabs, their steps purposeful, their presence serene. The food stalls overflowed with abundance, but vegetarian options were scarce, and beer was nowhere in sight — at least not openly. Eventually, I found a shopkeeper willing to sell it from under the counter, a small act of hospitality wrapped in secrecy.

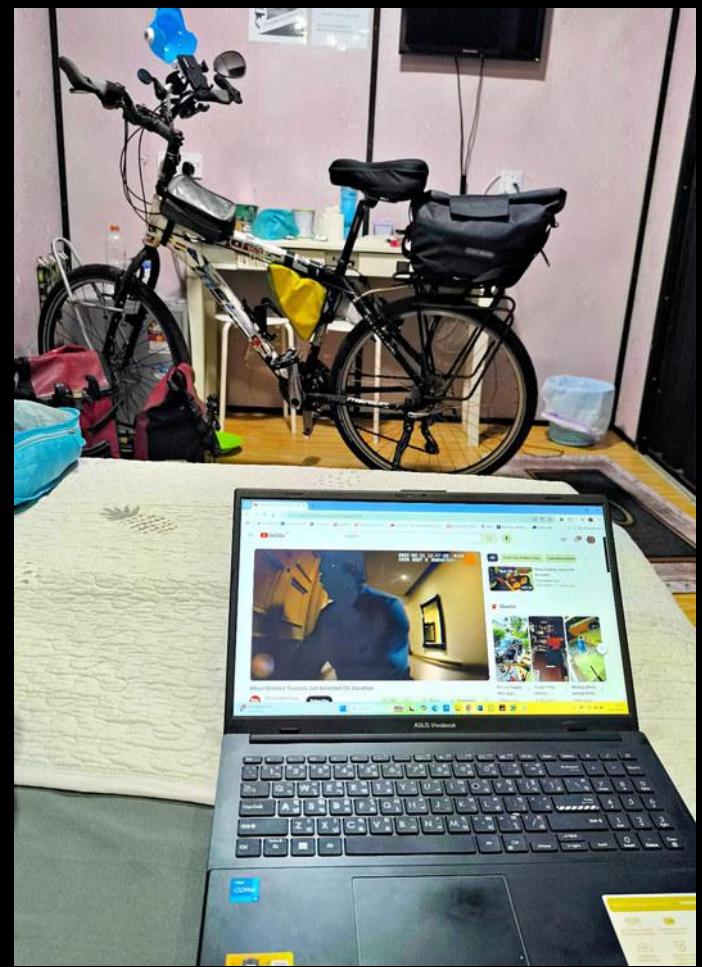


The Malaysian ringgit felt heavier in my hand than the Thai baht — stronger, more deliberate. Prices reflected that. But the village itself was gentle, unhurried, a soft landing after the long pull south.

It was already past four when I settled into a room for the night. New Year's Eve. No fireworks, no crowds, no celebration — just the quiet satisfaction of having crossed another border, another threshold. I thought of Cape Town kitchens, of Malay samosas and the warm, familiar scent of spice drifting through the air. The world is wide, but its flavours travel with us.

Outside, the evening deepened. Inside, I felt the subtle shift of a year turning — not with noise, but with a kind of inward clarity.

Some crossings are loud. Some are triumphant. This one was quiet, steady, and entirely mine.



Epilogue

Crossing into Malaysia felt less like an ending and more like an exhale — a soft shift in light, language, and rhythm. Journeys rarely end at borders; they end in the body, in the subtle ways distance rearranges you.

I didn't feel changed immediately. Change moves like a tide beneath the surface. But I felt a widening, a readiness, a sense that the road ahead — whatever shape it took — would meet me where I was.

The road didn't end here.

It simply changed its name. 2025.



About this Book

This blog documents my visit to Thailand on my way to Malaysia. There are many roads to choose from, and the route described in this blog may not necessarily be the best option. If you plan to use this blog as a guide for your own cycling tour, please consider the following points:

Distances

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

Time of Year and Date

This blog covers my visit to Thailand during October and December 2024. It's important to recognize that many things may have changed since then. The roads could have been improved or fallen into disrepair, and the accommodations I used might have been upgraded or demolished.

Insurance

A travel insurance policy is essential to cover loss, theft, and medical expenses. However, be aware that some policies may not cover certain activities such as scuba diving, motorcycling, and trekking. It's crucial to carefully read your policy to ensure it covers all the activities you plan to undertake.

Clothing

During a cycling holiday, we spend most of our time riding bikes, so having high-quality, padded cycling shorts is essential. You can wear comfortable footwear while cycling, but I recommend sandals for more casual riders. The weather in Thailand can be extremely hot year-round, so pack accordingly. Don't forget to include personal toiletries like insect repellent and anti-chafe cream. Lastly, I highly recommend wearing a cycling helmet for safety.

The Bicycle and Equipment

Comfort is the most important factor when choosing a bicycle. I use a mountain bike with a Merida frame equipped with Shimano Deore parts, Alex wheel rims, and Schwalbe tires. To carry my belongings during the ride, I use Tubus bicycle racks and Ortlieb panniers. While they can be a bit pricey, they are definitely worth the investment in the long run. It's essential to know how to fix a punctured tube, and having a phone holder on the handlebars for navigation is very convenient. I typically use either Organic Maps or Google Maps for this purpose. A handlebar bag is also a must-have for carrying a camera and other items you may need throughout the day.

Recommended Further Reading

I recommend "Lonely Planet." The e-book version is less expensive and serves as a handy guide. and a handy guide.



About Thailand

(For a more in-depth overview, please refer to the Internet or your favourite travel guide.)

Capital City

Bangkok, the capital, is often called the "Big Mango." It is a modern, sprawling, high-tech city that provides all the amenities one would expect from a capital.

Currency

The currency used in Thailand is the Thai Baht, denoted by the code THB and the symbol฿.

Language

Thai, specifically Siamese Thai, is the official language of Thailand, spoken by over 80 per cent of the country's approximately 63 million people.

Religion

While there is no official state religion (except for the law requiring the King to be Buddhist), all Thai citizens enjoy religious freedom. Buddhism is the predominant religion, with about 95% of the population following Theravada Buddhism.

Location and Size

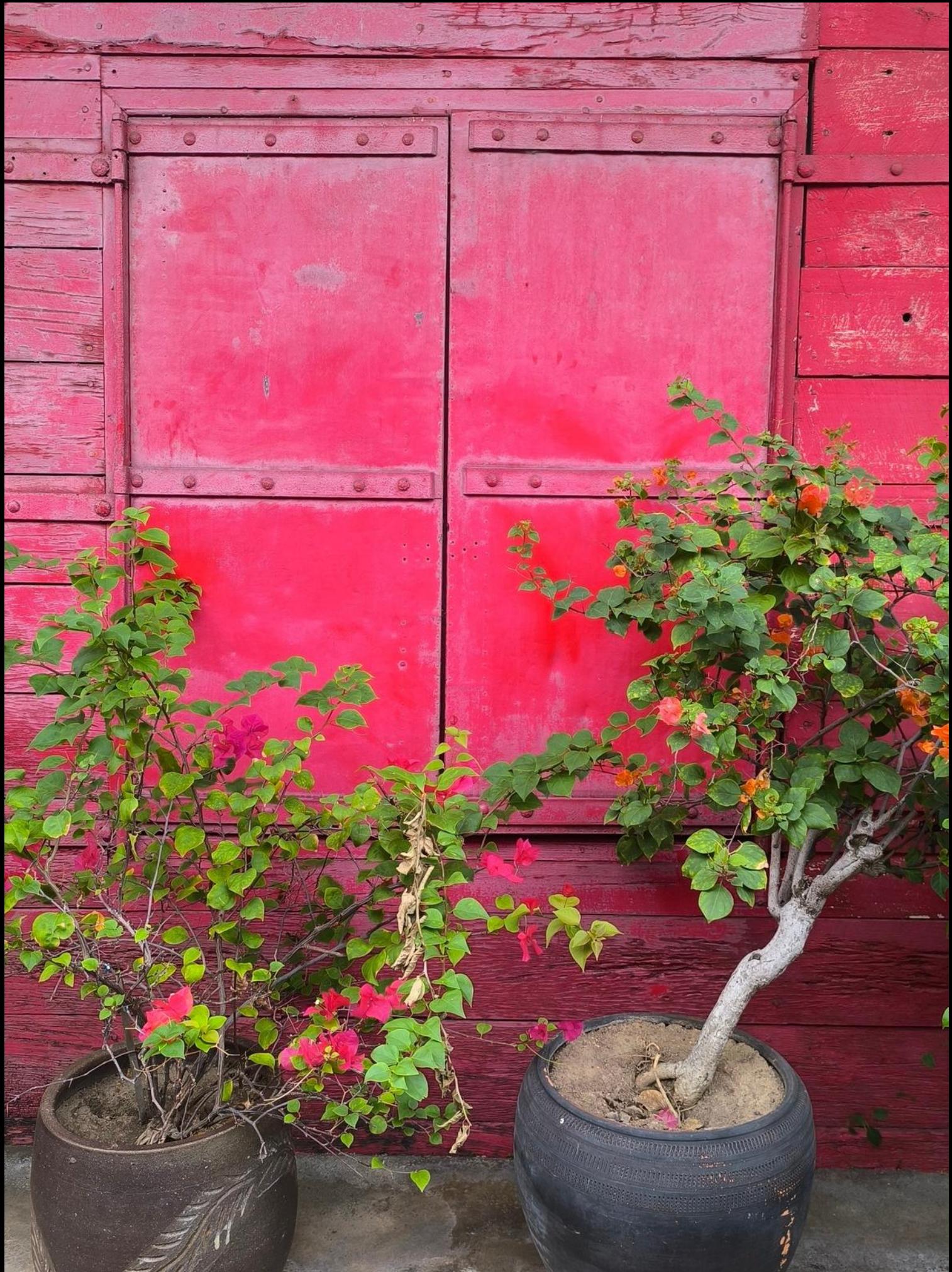
Thailand covers an area of 514,000 square kilometres in Southeast Asia. Formerly known as Siam, it stretches nearly two-thirds of the way down the Malay Peninsula, measuring 1,648 kilometres from North to South and 780 kilometres from East to West. It shares borders with Laos to the northeast and east, Cambodia and the Gulf of Thailand (formerly known as the Gulf of Siam) to the southeast, Malaysia to the south, the Andaman Sea to the southwest, and Myanmar to the west and northwest.

Population

As of 2019, Thailand had an estimated population of 69,297,372, with a population density of 136 people per square kilometre.

Internet Coverage

Internet services are widely available, particularly in urban areas



About the Author

Hailing from the vibrant city of Cape Town, South Africa, Leana's journey into the world of cycling began not with years of training but with a single bold decision. In 2005, driven by curiosity and a spirit of adventure, she entered the Tour D'Afrique—a legendary mountain bike race stretching from Cairo to Cape Town. With little cycling experience, Leana purchased a bicycle, flew to Cairo, and set out on a path that would lead her to become the first woman to complete the entire route from Cairo to Cape Town.

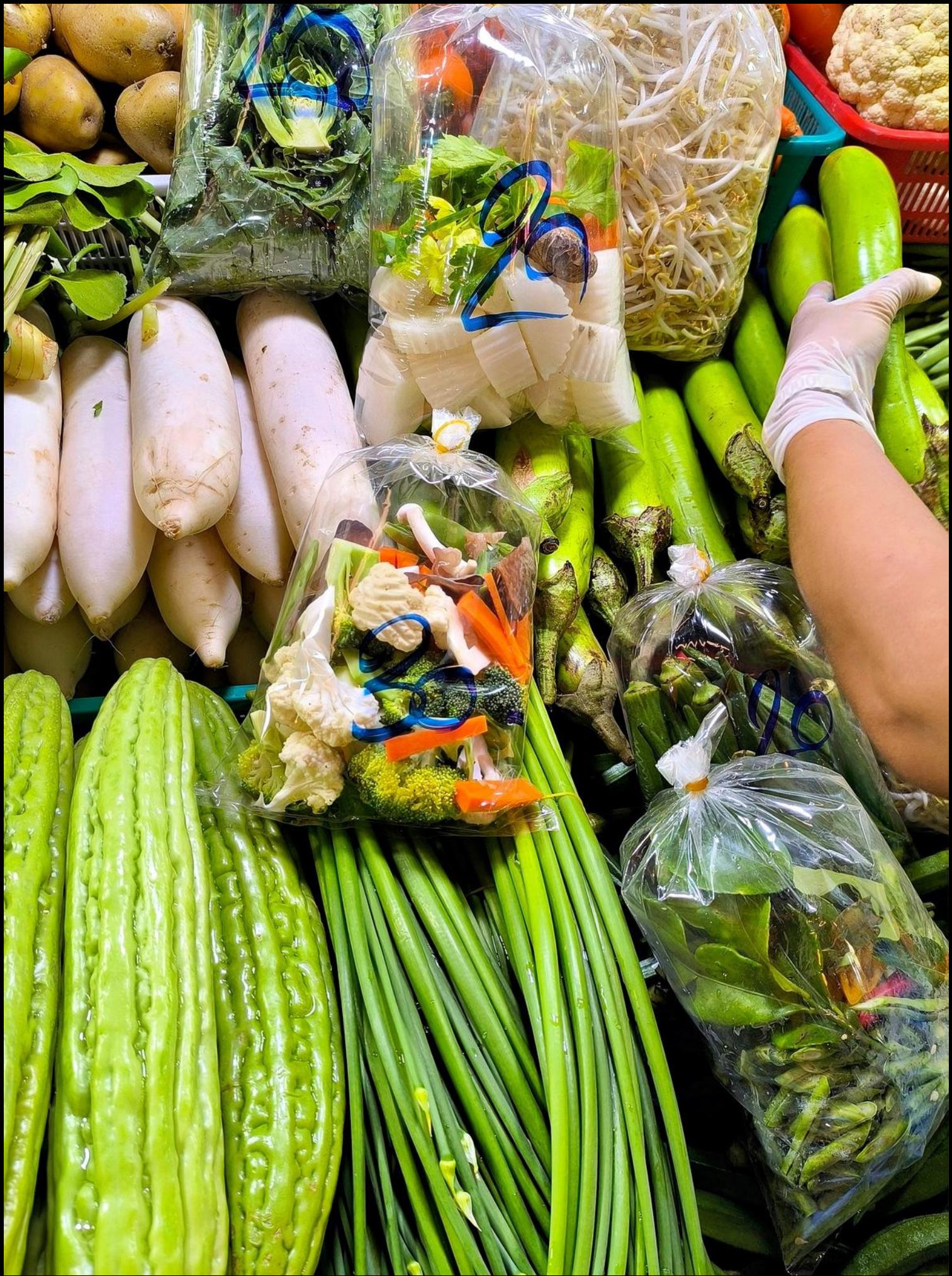
Returning home, Leana found that the rhythms of ordinary life could not compare to the freedom of the open road. The call of adventure proved irresistible, and in March 2007, she and her companion, Ernest Markwood, embarked on a journey that would evolve into a round-the-world cycling odyssey. Though they began together, the road eventually led them to discover their own unique directions—both in travel and in life.

Leana's travels have taken her across Africa twice, through the Middle East, Europe, the United Kingdom, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Indian subcontinent, China, Southeast Asia, and Australia. Her wanderlust then carried her to Ushuaia, Argentina, from where she cycled the length of South, Central, and North America over several years. Along the way, she explored many of the world's larger islands, including Cuba, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Today, Leana continues her adventures in Southeast Asia, ever inspired by the promise of new horizons and the enduring joy of life on two wheels.









**There is an immense sense of freedom in carrying with you
all that you need.**





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