

A paved path winds through a lush tropical forest. The path is light-colored and curves gently to the right. The forest is dense with various types of trees, including several tall palm trees with long, feathery fronds. The ground is covered in green grass and low-lying plants. The overall scene is vibrant and natural.

Cycle Touring Malaysia (7) Thai Border to Kuala Lumpur

Leana Niemand

<https://capetocape2.blogspot.com/>

<https://payhip.com/LeanaNiemand>

<https://issuhub.com/user/book/57398?sort=title>





**Cycle Touring Malaysia (7)
Thai Border to Kuala
Lumpur**



Thank You

I am immensely grateful for the kindness of strangers and the random acts of generosity I encountered during my cycle ride in Malaysia. 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-organized. 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.

Lastly, a big shoutout to Gerda Van Der Sandt, who made my writing more coherent and patiently tolerated my use of the Oxford comma.



CYCLE TOURING MALAYSIA (7)

693 Kilometres – 11 Days

Padang Besar – Alor Setar – 98 km

I woke determined to visit Langkawi since I hadn't been there in years! So, I set off on a beautiful, clear morning, heading to Kuala Perlis, the launching point for ferries to Langkawi. The ride turned out to be marvellous. The scenery looked straight out of a tourist brochure, and the traffic was light. Although the distance was only about 45 kilometres, I was taken aback by the endless row of vehicles waiting to board the ferry to the island.

Still, I made my way to the ticket office, only to be informed that I needed customs clearance for my bicycle! Can you believe it? It seems that crossing borders by bicycle is generally hassle-free, but customs clearance is required to go to Langkawi. This sounded like too much trouble, so I turned around and headed along the coast to Alor Setar.

It turned out to be another excellent ride on a country road hugging the coast. I had the ocean to my right and the bright green rice paddies (dotted with buildings for swiftlet farming) to my left. The lighting was beautiful, and I couldn't have asked for a better ride.

Once in Alor Setar, I headed to the Comfort Motel, probably the cheapest accommodation in town. The place has been around forever and is as basic as you can expect for 50 ringgit. Still, the elderly owners (LOL, they are most likely younger than me) were super friendly, and the accommodation came with air conditioning, a shower, and ground-floor rooms where I could wheel my wagon right into the room.



The official language is Malay, also known as Bahasa Malaysia, but due to its multicultural population, an array of other languages is spoken nationwide and I learned my Bahasa Malay from the road signs, LOL.





Alor Setar - George Town. Penang – 103 km

Alor Setar is a far more substantial town than I recalled from my previous visits, and I couldn't resist snapping one more picture of the stunning Zahir Mosque with its Moorish-inspired architecture.

No sooner had I left than I found myself on a tranquil canal path that wound through lush rice fields. Being situated only 5.5 degrees north of the equator, the warm sun beat down upon me, and I was soon drenched in sweat. Yet, amid the heat, I felt like the luckiest person on the planet as I biked through charming settlements. Here, friendly, burka-clad women offered an array of delectable homemade snacks.

I know I keep harping on about the scenery, but the Malaysian countryside is simply breathtaking. Every twist and turn revealed distant hills draped in lush greenery and bright green rice paddies against a clear blue sky. I hummed along to my music, lost in the moment, as I made my way toward Butterworth.

At Tanjong Dawai, a ferry carried me and my bike across the sprawling Merbok River. The ride came at a hefty fee, but it saved me from cycling a long detour along the main road and was worth every ringgit.

I stopped numerous times to take pictures or admire the scenery, and it was already late by the time I arrived at the ferry terminal in Butterworth. The new terminal was quite a rigmarole and more cumbersome than its predecessor. Eventually, I secured a ticket and boarded the ferry to George Town on Penang Island.



Cycling into the famous George Town felt like a homecoming, so I headed straight to Hotel Noble. This establishment has been around for decades and is undoubtedly the most budget-friendly accommodation available.

I barely had time to unload my panniers before I dashed off to the famous food stalls, my stomach growling in protest for having gone without food all day.

Penang didn't appear historic from the ferry, as high-rise buildings dominated the skyline. However, my short walk to the ATM revealed just how George Town has earned its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. With Penang's central location in the Strait of Malacca, the island was an essential stopover along the ancient trade route connecting Europe, the Middle East, India, and China. Since the Strait of Malacca lies at the intersection of two monsoon seasons, ships couldn't set sail until the winds were favourable. Consequently, Penang became a diverse melting pot of cultures, a diversity that remains evident to this day.

It was blisteringly hot, and I didn't do much exploring. Most of my day was spent at the Clan Jetties, established over 100 years ago. The Clan Jetties are historic Chinese villages built over the water on long jetties. Typically, each jetty is owned by a single family clan, with dozens of wooden houses on each one.

Later I had the pleasure of meeting Connie Chew, a friend I know through social media. Although we've never met in person, we have closely followed each other's travels around the world for the past 10 years. I can't imagine two people more different, and I genuinely appreciate social media for making such connections possible.



Connie is a fermentation specialist known for her expertise in fermentation science, particularly in food and beverage production. Connie is also dedicated to educating others about fermentation techniques and is involved in developing sustainable fermentation methods. Her work contributes to the broader movement of using fermentation for culinary purposes and innovative applications related to health and environmental sustainability.

We spent the entire day being driven around by her lovely son, Mark, to sample Penang's famous delicacies—quite different from my usual fare! I had the opportunity to enjoy a delicious iced coffee and tea mix. I never imagined such a concoction could taste so good! Just as delightful was the humble coconut roti. Thank you, Connie and Mark, for a wonderful day!





23

和睦家庭萬事興

四季平安好運來

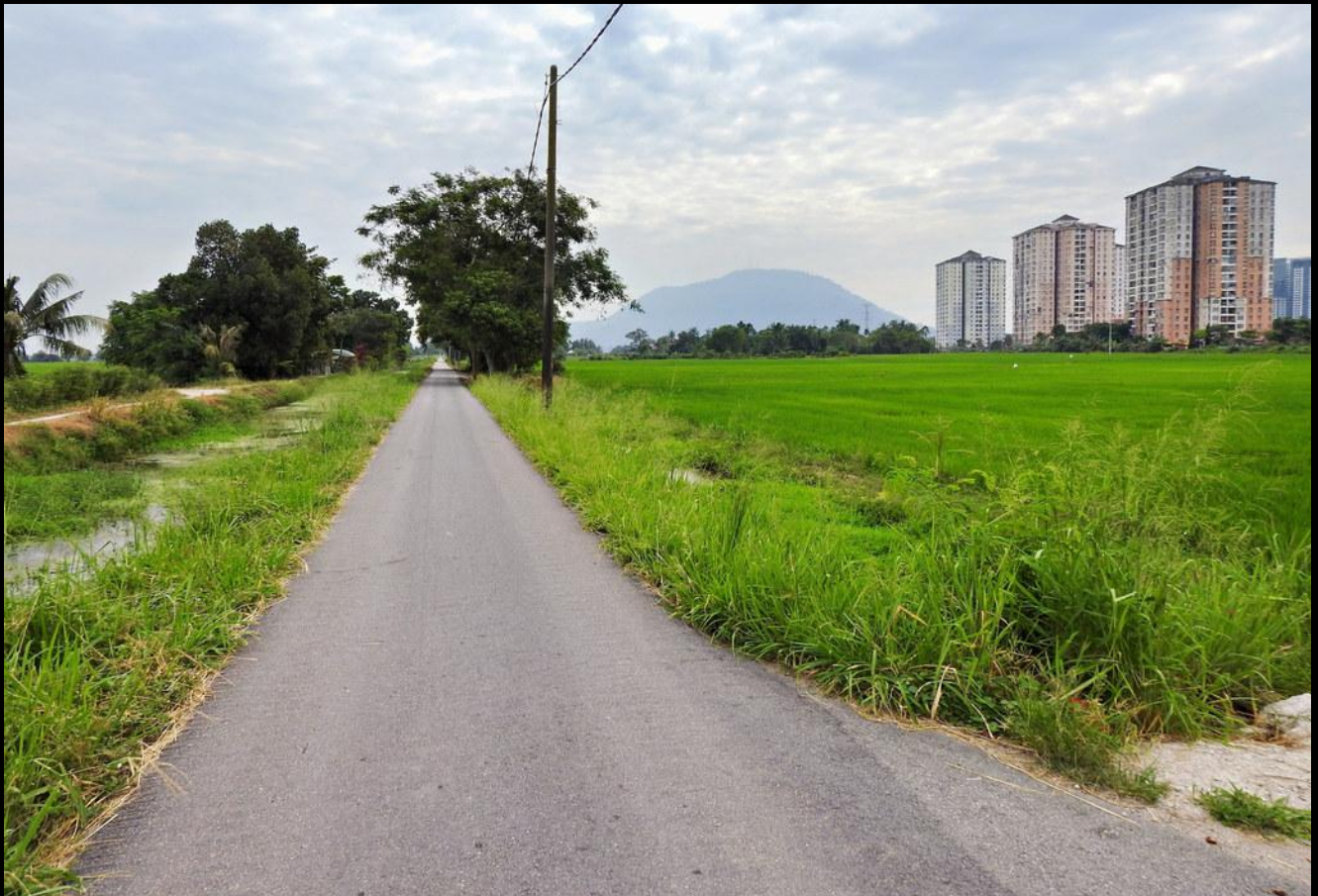
迎春接福人發財



George Town, Penang – Bagan Serai - 98 km

The time was 10 o'clock when I cycled onto the ferry for the short trip to the mainland. What I expected to be a quick ride turned into a whole-day affair as I was determined to avoid toll roads and highways. Malaysia is developing at an alarming rate, and I tried various routes to steer clear of traffic. Eventually, I found myself on a coastal road that offered pleasant cycling conditions.

When the weather began to look threatening, I searched for a hotel, but the only one nearby was expensive. Rather than cycling 40 kilometres to Taiping, I decided to head back to the main road, which had more accommodation options. The only hotel that offered a somewhat reasonable rate was still pricey and situated near a mosque, and it was no surprise that it seemed to cater only to Muslims. Although almost all hotels come with a prayer mat and a Qibla indicator, this one had a list of what not to do as long as my arm.

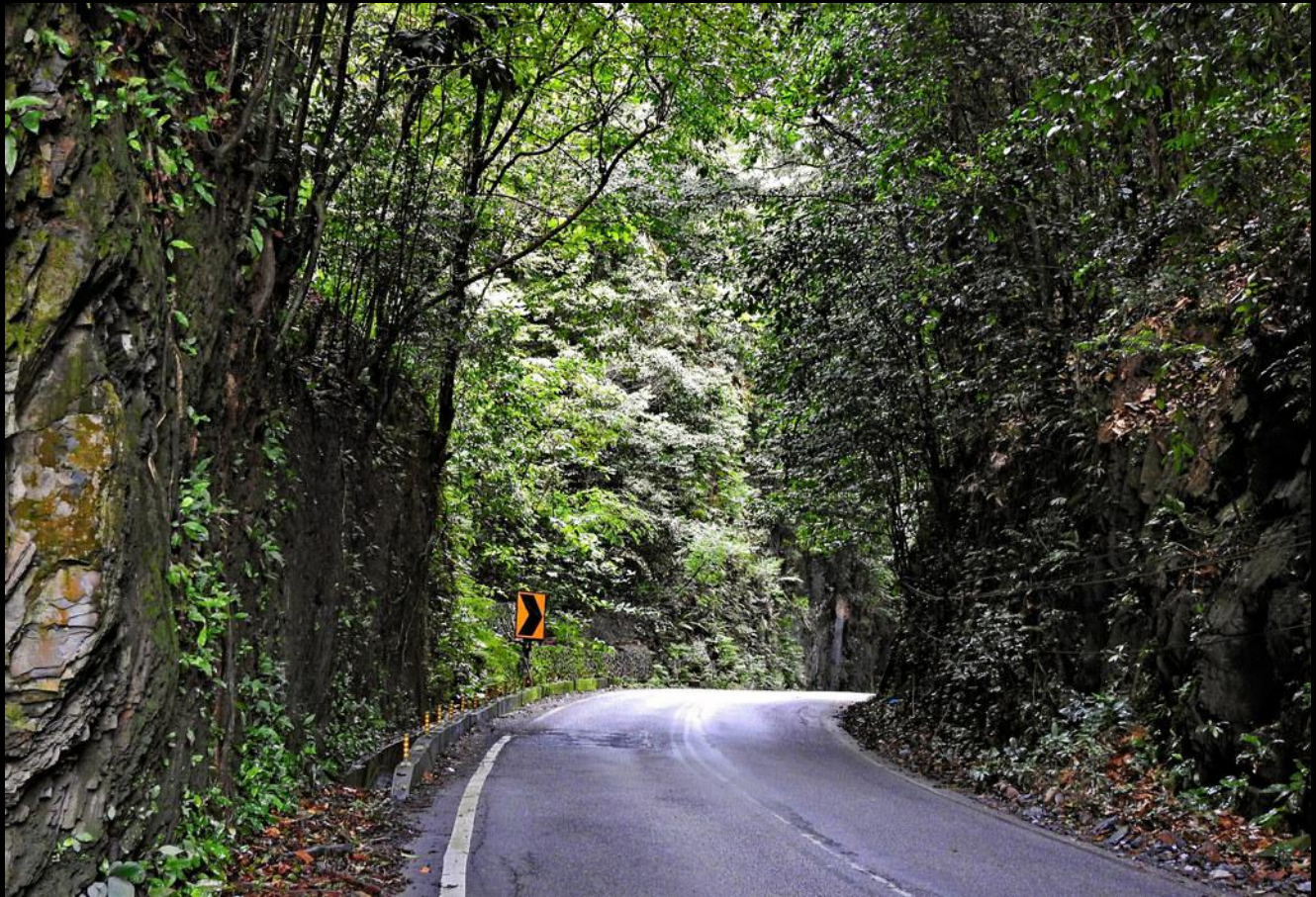


Bagan Serai – Taiping – 37 km

Malaysia's one-hour time difference kept me awake until 1 a.m. It also meant it didn't get light until well past 7.30 a.m. If it weren't for the sounds of other guests stirring, I would have probably slept even later. This morning was no different. By the time I woke up, it was still raining, and I reluctantly started loading my bike.

As the rain eased, a beautiful, fresh morning emerged, and I set off through the rice fields. It turned out to be a fantastic day of cycling with stunning scenery. Malaysia's landscapes away from the cities and highways are truly remarkable. I soon arrived in Taiping, where I decided to stay as I received documents that needed signing, which meant I needed access to a printer and scanner. Unfortunately, my chosen accommodation was a disappointment. All I'll say is that I will NEVER use OYO accommodations again.







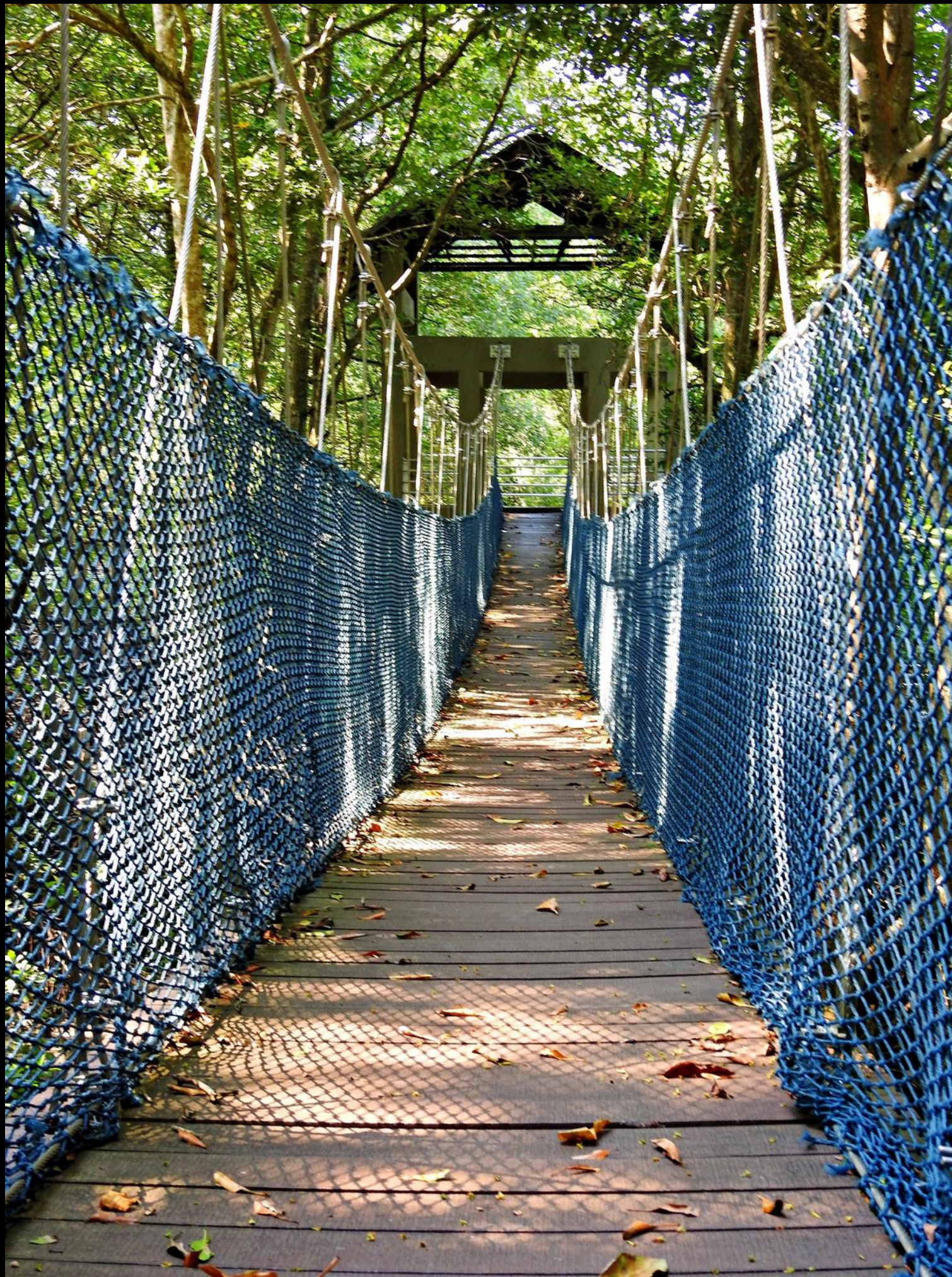
Taiping – Lumut – 93 km

I might be getting used to the time difference, or perhaps it was due to the lumpy mattress, but I found myself awake at 6 o'clock. It was still dark because, theoretically, it was winter, and the sun didn't rise until about 7:30 a.m. I lingered for a while, and it was nearly 9 o'clock before I finally set out. Not much happened during the ride and I spent most of the day on a proper road. Although it was a secondary road, it was relatively busy with trucks.

My route took me through dense oil palm plantations, lush with ferns and mosses. I didn't stop often since there wasn't much to explore. As I approached Lumut, I crossed the Sungai Munjung, which appears as an inlet from the Strait of Malacca. This area is home to Lumut Port and the Industrial Park, which provides space for warehousing and transshipment. It's not surprising that the road was crowded with trucks.

I was pleased to see that the region also contains a large and protected mangrove area as mangroves are essential to coastal ecosystems. Their roots play a crucial role in coastal protection, acting as a buffer against storm surges and providing unique habitats for various species. I often forget just how good mangroves are at capturing and storing carbon.







Lumut – Sungai Besar – 121 km

From the beginning, I was on one-lane country roads. It was quiet, and I hardly ever saw anyone. Once along the coast, I stopped to fill up with water and also had a portion of nasi lemak, folded up in a triangular parcel. It consisted of rice, peanuts, a boiled egg, and a fiery sauce with tiny fish, no more than a centimetre or two. It took me forever to scoop out these tiny fishes. I ate my food while watching fishermen on a boat chasing a school of fish into their net, or at least that is what I thought they were doing.

Malaysia experiences a tropical rainforest climate with high rainfall throughout the year. I understand that the average annual rainfall typically ranges from 1000 mm to 2500 mm per annum. Some regions, especially the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and certain highland areas in Borneo, get even more rain. The country's unique position near the equator means there isn't a real dry season, and it can rain at almost any time. Most of my day was thus spent cycling through rice fields and oil palm plantations. Malaysia is the world's second-largest palm oil producer, after Indonesia.

Towards the end of the day, I crossed the mighty Perak River, or Sungai Perak. It is the second-longest river in Peninsular Malaysia after the Pahang River. Its source lies near the Thailand-Malaysia border.

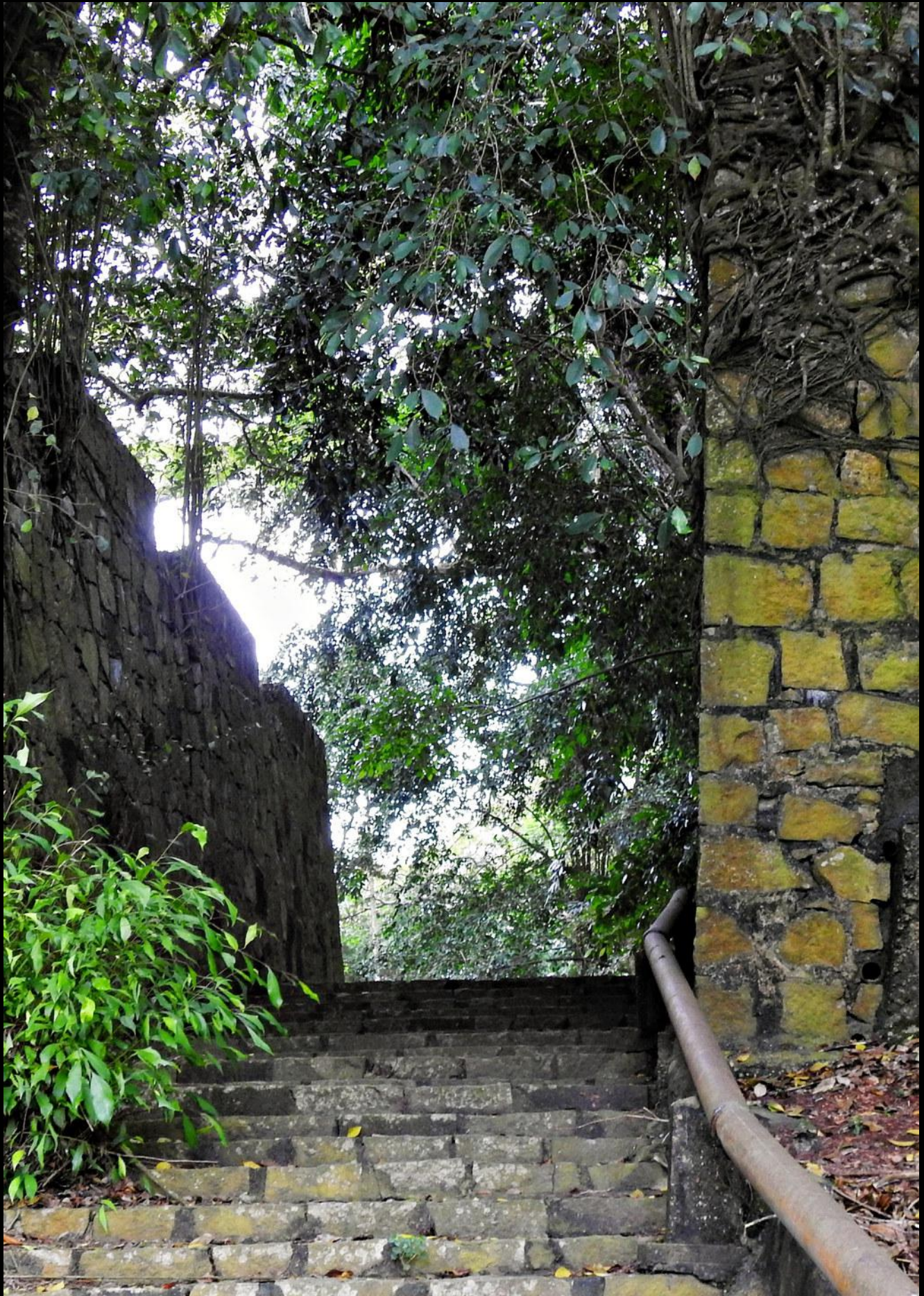


Sungai Besar – Kuala Selangor – 64 km

Shortly after leaving, I stopped at a roadside vendor to enjoy my daily roti, which was delicious. I continued to find rural roads leading me past rice fields ready for harvest. It was easy cycling, and I rolled into Kuala Selangor early, as the distance was only about 60 kilometres.

After arriving, I took a short walk up the historic hill of Bukit Melawati, where I came across monkeys, cannons, and various fascinating artefacts. Bukit Melawati once served as the administrative centre and stronghold of the Selangor Sultanate in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The hill features remnants of a heavily fortified fort built between 1782 and 1826. This fort fell to the Dutch in 1784, but it is historically significant as it was the first time a sultan managed to recapture a fort from a foreign power.







Kuala Selangor – Puchong, Kuala Lumpur – 77 km

I woke not feeling bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and finding a tick in my bed didn't help. It's highly likely I brought the tick home after my meander in the little Nature Park, and I hoped I wouldn't succumb to tick-bite fever.

The ride into a big city is seldom scenic, and I tried my utmost to stay on a smaller road. Unfortunately, the smaller roads were narrow and equally busy with trucks and buses. I was relieved to arrive at my friend, Peter. Peter is a popular WarmShower host, and I've known him for the past 10 years. I was surprised to find I had a lovely flatlet to sleep in, and the fridge was even stocked with beer. Peter, you are the best!

I spent the next day doing virtually nothing, just chilling in my very comfortable room. By then, the bite under my arm was a large, red, blistery area, and although I didn't feel sick, I was somewhat lethargic.

I hung about at Peter's, waiting for documents that needed to be verified at the embassy.



Puchong

I planned to fly to India and had a few things to prepare before my flight. Peter kindly provided me with a bike box.

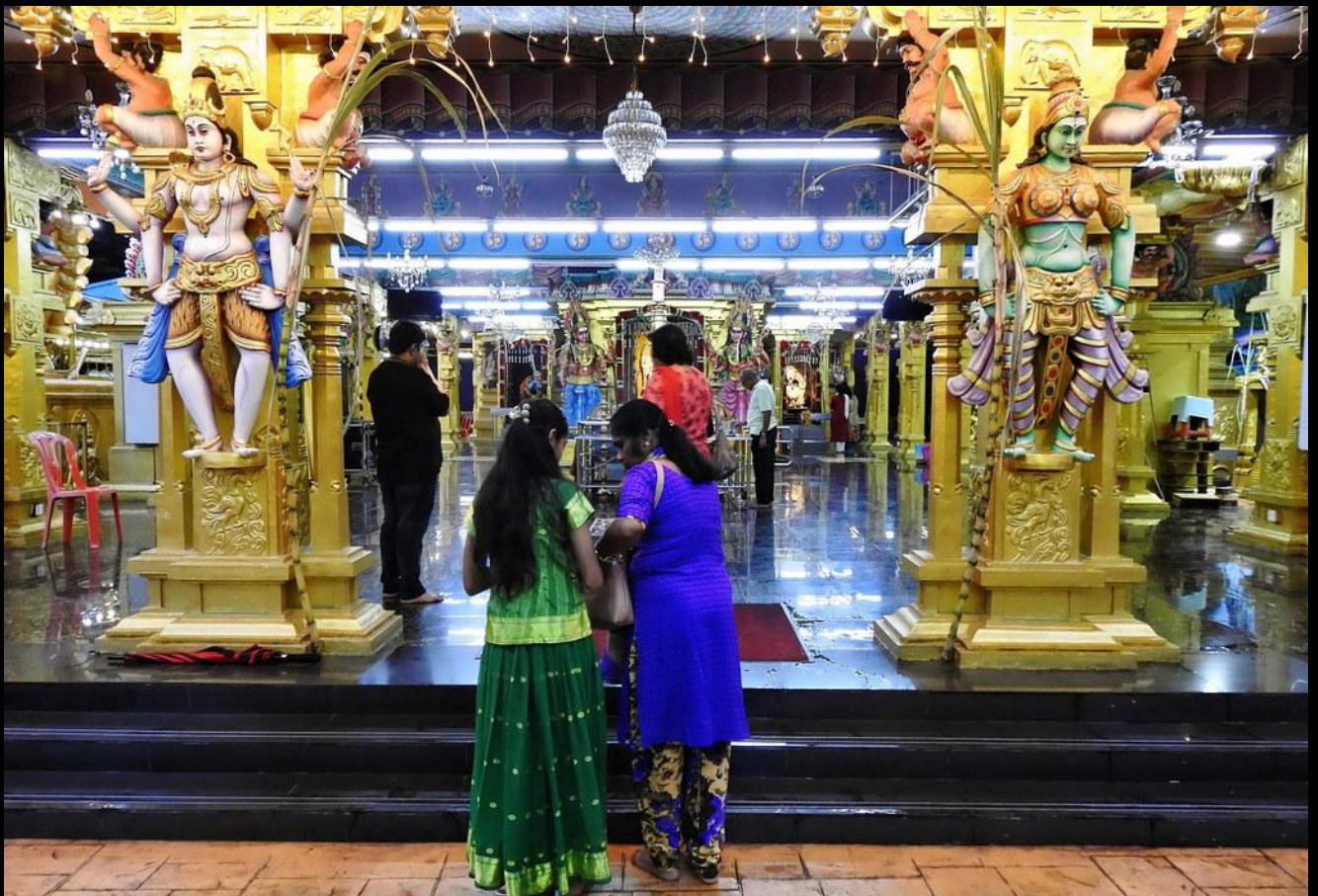
The following morning, we had breakfast at a nearby food court, where I enjoyed the most delicious kari laksa which became my go-to breakfast. Later, Gan, Peter's friend and a social media friend of mine, dropped by, and we shared a few beers and stories as we are all cycle tourers.

The following morning, I slept in because Saras, a lady I met five years ago in Kuala Selangor, came to visit. We had lunch together, and I felt somewhat embarrassed since I didn't think I paid for a single meal since my arrival at Peter's place. I feel like I should be the one paying, given that I stayed free of charge.

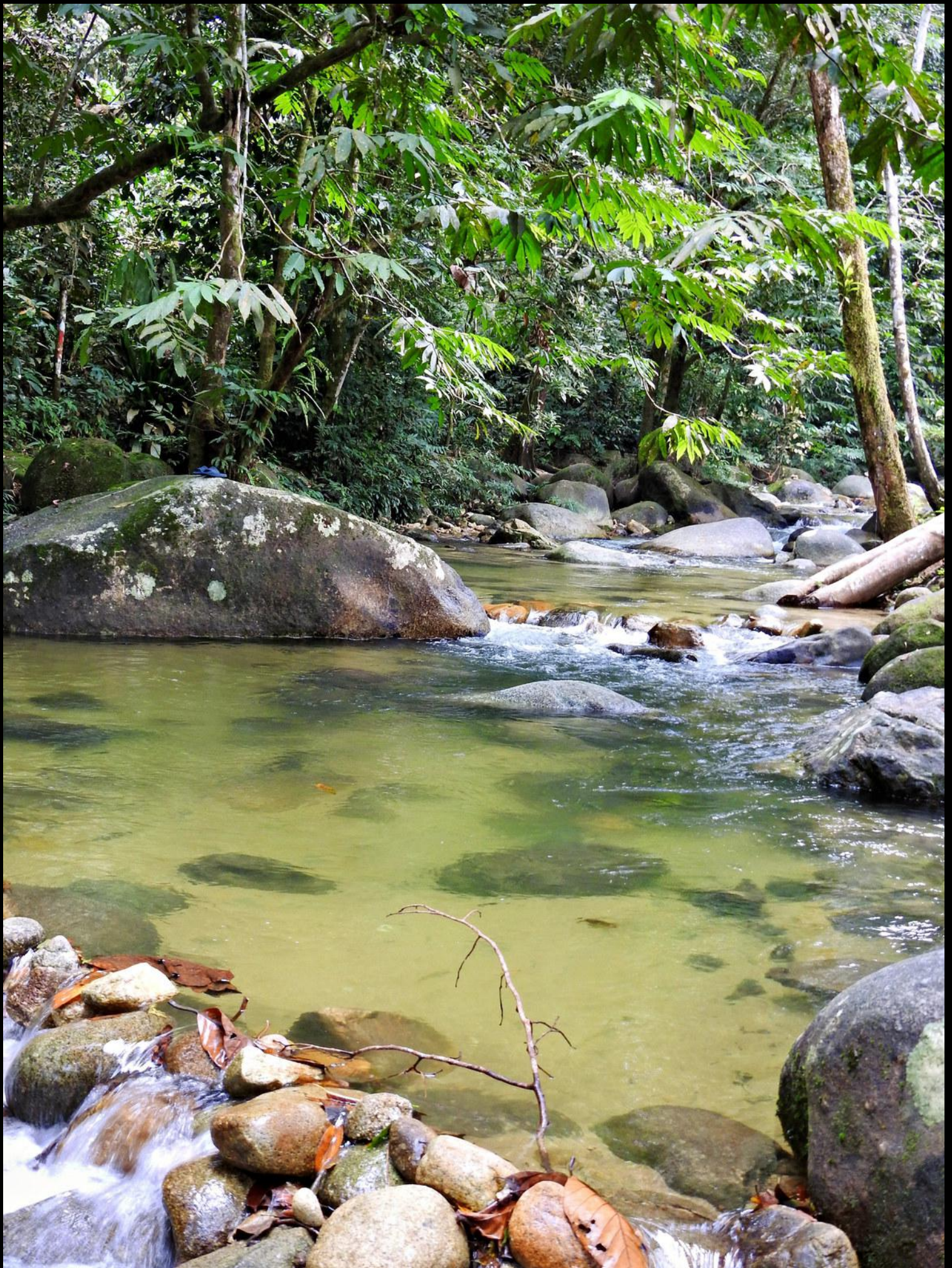
Peter planned to go camping, at Sungai Sendat, Ulu Yam, and I spent the following night at Saras's place to celebrate the start of Pongal, the harvest festival. In the kitchen she prepared a traditional Pongal meal of sour and sweet rice before donning a salwar kameez for our visit to the temple.

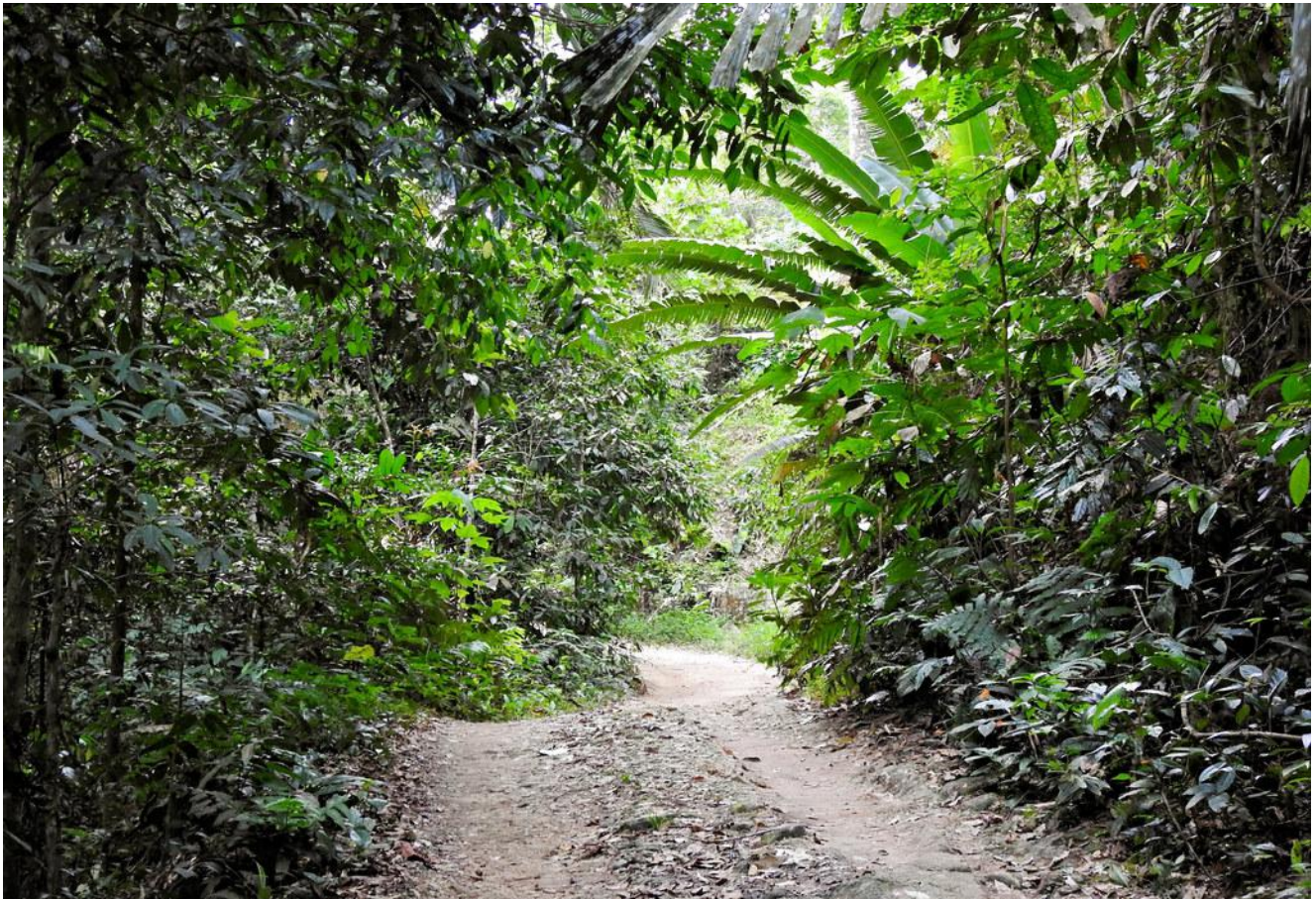
The bite under my arm spread across my chest and back, and I thought seeing a doctor before our planned camping trip was a good idea. At the clinic, I learned that it wasn't a bite but shingles. Have you ever! Peter picked us up at around 10 a.m. and we drove to Sungai Sendat, Ulu Yam. Peter prepared a feast and the weather was great.

Returning to Peters, I was in agony, and I stocked up on painkillers after another visit to the clinic, where they prescribed anti-viral tablets and cream. I also stocked up on two different types of painkillers as I was determined to kill this virus.











Puchong

The much-awaited documents arrived, and I ventured into the city centre. Unfortunately, my day at the embassy was unsuccessful as back home I discovered the most important document wasn't signed! To top off an already bad day, three of my attempts to draw money were declined, but still, the money was deducted from my account. Thanks to my host, Peter, I had a very comfortable place to stay. After transferring money into his account, I had cash in hand, all made possible with the Wise app. I planned on repeating the embassy process the following Monday, hopefully with more success.

Puchong

My second visit to the embassy was more successful but, unfortunately, my visit to the bank wasn't. After speaking to customer care, I was told there was nothing they could do to unlock the account, and I had to visit a Bangkok Bank in Thailand.



Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – Jomtien, Thailand

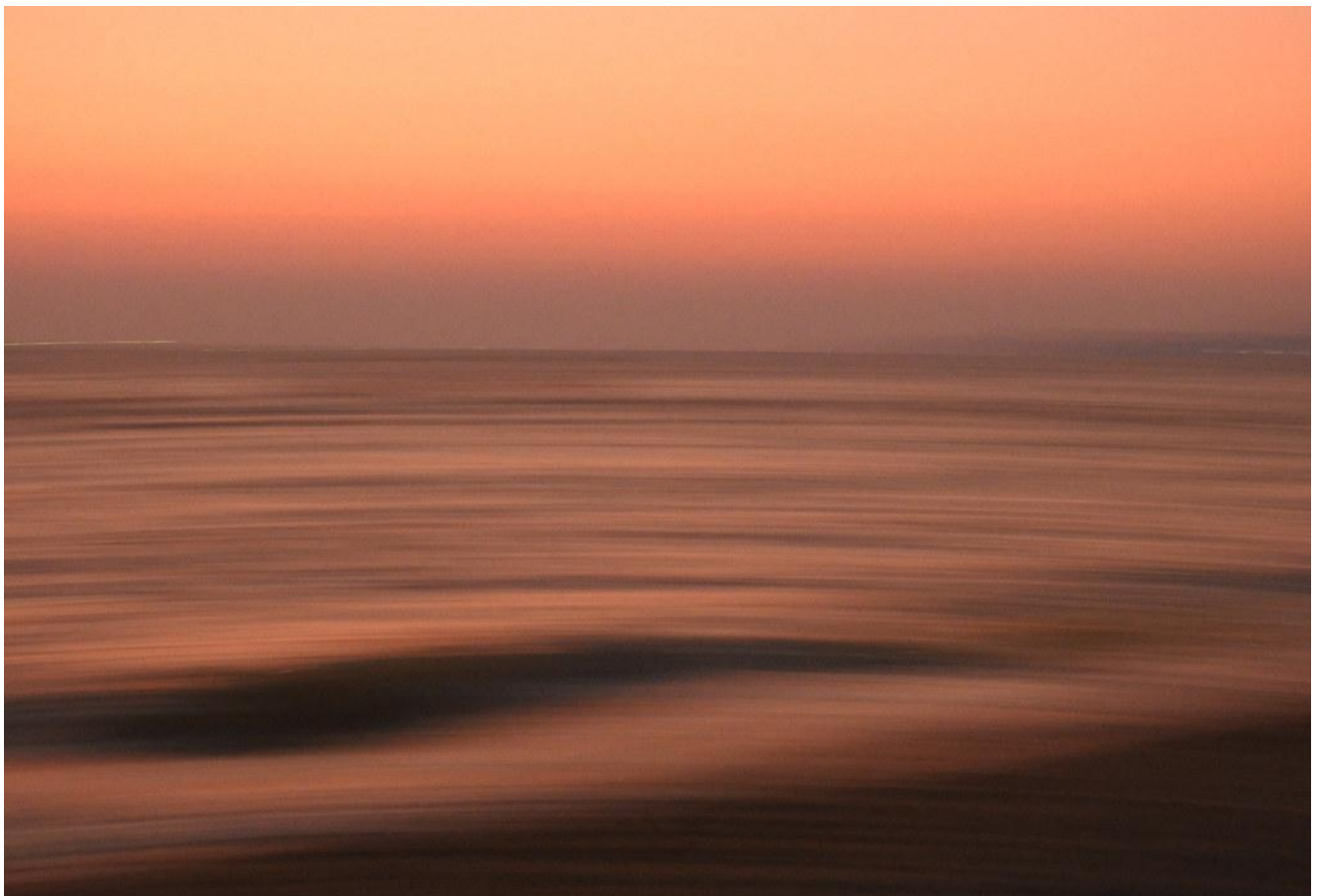
Although my flight to Bangkok was only at 12h00, I was up early to pack my panniers, which I left at Peter's place. Later, he drove me to Putrajaya station, where I caught the KLIA line to the airport. It's all so easy.

My short flight to Bangkok was uneventful, as in such a confined space, everyone pretends they don't see anyone else. It's what we do when people move into our personal space. Bangkok Airport was busy, and the buses to Pattaya were fully booked, so it took some time before I was seated on the bus to Jomtien. Once there, I walked the two or three kilometres back to my room to get some exercise.

Shortly before reaching my emergency bunker, I met my neighbours, Peet and Charmy, and we had a few beers before I stumbled home. I took two painkillers before going to bed and slept like a baby.

Jomtien

First thing, I was at the bank to change my bank card. This little excursion took the best part of the morning, and when I returned, I found I couldn't get into the banking app. I thought it best to wait until the following morning. Even this will end!



Jomtien

I got word from Dawn that she would arrive on 31 January for a two-week holiday, and I was happy to have company.

After two weeks, my shingles were still bothering me, on top of which I contracted a nasty chest infection, which was doing the rounds in Thailand. This was not going my way.

Thailand – Malaysia

As Dawn was returning to Australia on the 12th, I booked a flight to Malaysia to collect my bicycle and bags, as I was in no condition to cycle. I returned to Thailand on 15 February, hoping I would soon feel better, but until then, I planned on lying low and waiting for the shingles and chest infection to clear.



About this Blog

This blog documents my ride in Malaysia from the Thailand border to Kuala Lumpur. 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 documents my visit to Malaysia in January 2025. It's important to note that many things may have changed since then. The roads may have been improved or deteriorated, and 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 essential to carefully read the policy to ensure it covers the activities you plan to undertake.

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 lightweight hiking shoes or sandals. It is sweltering in Malaysia year-round, except when visiting areas of higher elevation, 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 selecting a bicycle for your needs, comfort is the most crucial factor. 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 definitely 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 handlebars 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 Malaysia (Please refer to the internet or your favourite travel guide for a more in-depth overview)

Capital city

Kuala Lumpur is a modern metropolis that offers all the amenities typically found in a capital city.

Currency

The Malaysian Ringgit (MYR) is currently equivalent to 0.25 USD (1 MYR = \$0.25), with the symbol RM.

Language

Malaysia's official language is Bahasa Melayu, also known as Bahasa Malaysia. However, English, Mandarin, and Tamil are also commonly spoken.

Religion

Islam is the predominant religion in Malaysia, with the majority of the population being Muslim. The Chinese population is primarily Buddhist or Taoist, while the Indian population is mainly Hindu. There is also a minority of Christians.

Location and size

Malaysia is a country situated at the southernmost tip of the Asian continent. It is roughly divided into two major areas: the Malaysian peninsula and Malaysian Borneo. Malaysia also includes 878 islands, most of which are located off the coast of Borneo. Some famous islands are Langkawi, Penang, Malacca, Tioman, the Perhentians, and Pangkor Island.

Population

Malaysia has over 30 million people, making it the world's 114th most populous country, with a density of 97.25 people per square kilometre. Despite this, once you leave the major cities, it's easy to imagine yourself in a much less crowded place. The country is a beautiful melting pot of different cultures, with Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures coexisting, each with its own unique food, religion, language, and customs. Malaysians comprise about 50% Malays, 23% Chinese, and 7% Indians.

Internet coverage

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



About the Author

Born and bred in Cape Town, South Africa, Leana was never much of a cyclist. However, her love for cycle touring ignited in 2005 when she participated in the Tour D'Afrique, a race from Cairo to Cape Town. She bought a bicycle, flew to Cairo, and had no idea what she was getting herself into. To her surprise, she cycled every inch of the way to Cape Town. On her return, she found it surprisingly challenging to return to regular life and decided to continue travelling by bicycle.

Leana, accompanied by Ernest Markwood, left Cape Town at the end of March 2007. What was intended as a long bike ride became an around-the-world cycle ride. Initially, they cycled together most of the time. Eventually, each found their own pace and direction in life and on the road. The journey was not without its challenges, from extreme weather conditions to navigating unfamiliar terrain, all of which added to the adventure.

In the process, Leana has cycled Africa twice, the Middle East, Europe (including the UK), Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Indian subcontinent, China, Southeast Asia and Australia. Her adventurous spirit led her from Australia to Ushuaia, Argentina, where she spent the next few years cycling in South, Central, and North America. Afterwards, a year was spent visiting the larger islands, including Cuba, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan, each journey filled with excitement and new experiences.

At the time of writing, Leana found herself back in Southeast Asia.









Cycling touring is not just a sport; it's a lifestyle.



