

# Cycle Touring Thailand The South Coast and Beyond



Leana Niemand

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

<https://payhip.com/LeanaNiemand>

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



**Cycle Touring Thailand – The South  
Coast and Beyond  
1 315 Kilometres – 20 Days**



## **Thank You**

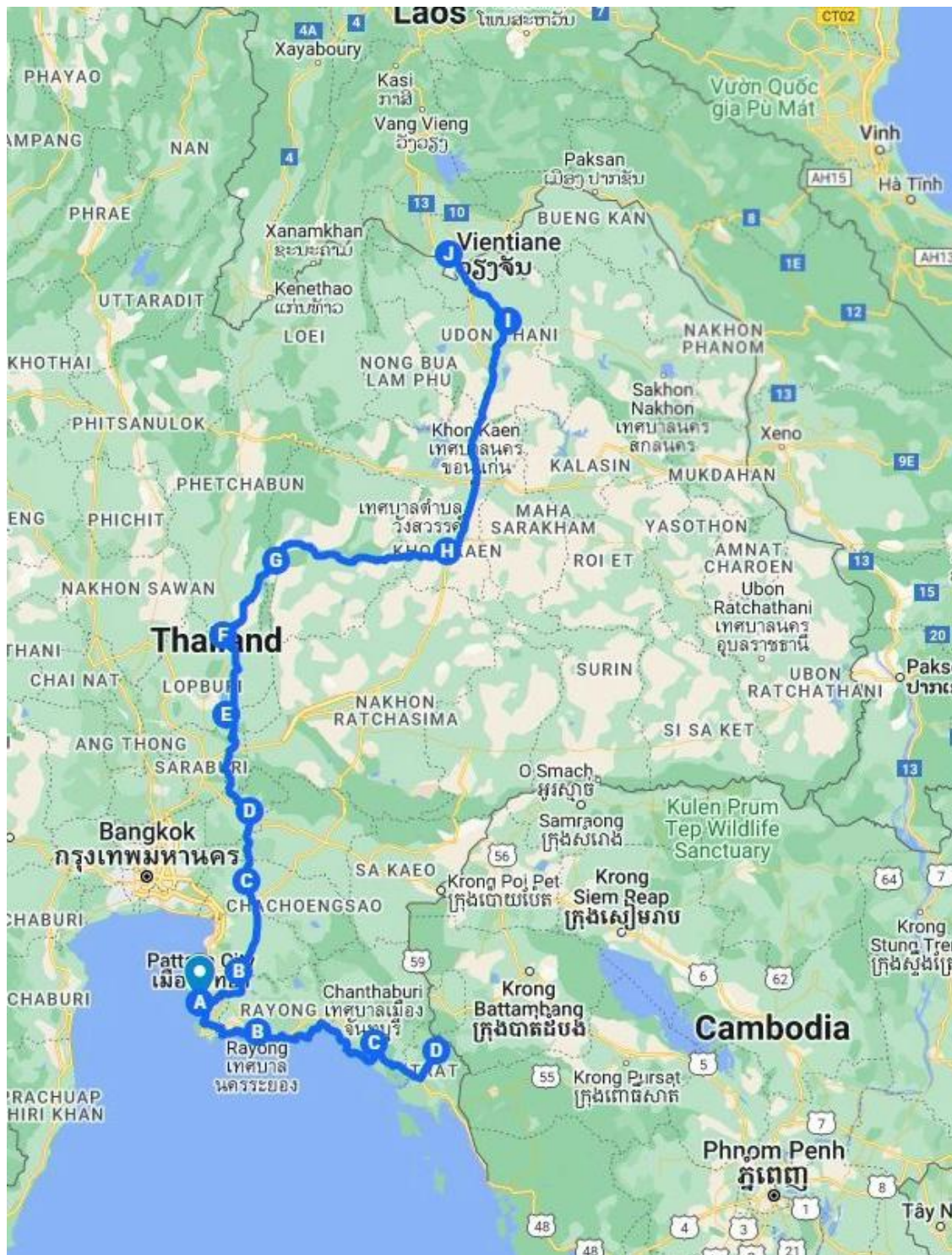
As always, when cycle touring, I was amazed and humbled by the kind generosity of strangers and the random acts of kindness bestowed on me by the people of Thailand.

I'm immensely grateful to my sister Amanda, who has selflessly kept my journal entries and photos well-organised over the years. Without her, there would have been no record of my travels.

As always, I'm much indebted to my friend Val Abrahamse, who kept my personal and financial matters at home in good order while I travelled the globe. It would have been impossible to achieve this without her conscientious efforts.



# Cycle Touring Thailand The South Coast and Beyond 1 315 Kilometres – 20 Days





# **THAILAND 22.2 – The South Coast**

## **305 Km - 4 Days**

### **10 July – 20 July 2024**

#### **Pattaya – Rayong – 62 km**

I was ready surprisingly early. Perhaps it was because I wasn't embarking on a long journey, just a 10-day adventure before Dawn arrives on the 20th. I couldn't wait for her visit and the fun activities we had planned (definitely not cycling, LOL). My time in Thailand was drawing to a close. I didn't want to jinx it but, hopefully, I'll be able to leave Thailand (as much as I love it) before the year ends. Being holed up in nothing more than a hotel room for such a long time is challenging.

As I pedalled out of Jomtien, I couldn't help but chuckle. There's always an exhilarating feeling when I set off towards an unknown destination, even if the area is familiar. Despite the overcast weather, I daydreamed so much that I hardly took any pictures. Most of my time was spent figuring out my new Garmin watch. I still don't know why I thought getting it was a good idea. It's too complicated, and I don't see much difference from my inexpensive Xiaomi Redmi watch. Oh well, what's done is done, and I'll have to make it work.

Reaching Rayong, I decided it was time to call it a day, mainly because the Richy Grant guesthouse is cheap as chips and provides washing machines and filtered water. Plus, there's a night market nearby! Before heading to the market, I should have grabbed a small bite to eat, as I returned with enough food to feed an army. The rest of the evening was spent reorganising my panniers while eating through my mountain of food.



## **Rayong - Roadside guest cottage – 85 km**

The previous night, the sky put on a dramatic show with heavy rain, thunder, and lightning. As the morning arrived, a drizzle persisted, giving me the perfect excuse to organise my belongings at leisure.

Finally, when the rain subsided, I set out. However, after a mere five kilometres, the rain returned, forcing me to seek refuge at a petrol station with an Amazon Café. The day, however, took a turn for the better, offering ideal cycling conditions with a gentle ocean breeze and a thin cloud cover, a complete contrast to the earlier deluge.

My progress was slow as I made adjustments every few kilometres – first, it was my watch, then the chain, and later, the tyres. I also took advantage of the conditions and frequently stopped to snap a few pics. It's always such a pleasure to cycle the South Coast. Around five o'clock, I stumbled upon charming roadside cottages with nearby shops and restaurants and thought it the perfect spot to spend the night.





## **Roadside cottage – Chanthaburi – 75 km**

I woke up surprisingly early at six o'clock, made coffee, and sat listening to the many birds whistling their individual tunes. Later, I packed my belongings, said goodbye to the owner, and continued my bike ride along the coast.

It was a rather overcast day, but cycling the scenic route along the coast is always a privilege. Along the way, I stopped at a few viewpoints to enjoy the views, which no doubt came with a bit of a climb. With 20 kilometres left to go to Chanthaburi, I turned inland and passed emerald-green rice fields, which made the ornate Buddhist temples in the area even more striking.

When I arrived in Chanthaburi, I went straight to the old waterfront community and checked into Laluna River House. It's affordable at 420 THB per room and offers a lovely river view. Since I arrived early, I spent the rest of the day eating. The following day, I spent a super lazy day in Chanthaburi, not doing much except walking around the supermarket and investigating the old town.

The durian, also known as the "king of fruit" in Asia, remains, at least to me, one of the strangest fruits. Although native to Borneo and Sumatra, it is grown all over Southeast Asia. It is enormous, mostly 30 cm x 15 cm, and, as can be expected from such a large and heavy fruit, it grows on large branches directly on the trunk. It has a tough, spiky rind, which is nearly impossible to open unless you know what you are doing. It also comes with an overpowering (unpleasant?) odour. Despite this, it hides a soft, creamy flesh - a pricey delicacy in Thailand. I've never bought any as they are expensive, but I love durian-flavoured ice cream. The smell is so strong that most hotels and guesthouses don't allow durian.



### **Chantaburi – Bo Rai Resort – 83 km**

I was unsure where I wanted to go, so I followed minor roads until I reached the main road. Not feeling like spending time on the busy Sukhumvit Road, I veered off at the first opportunity. Soon, I found myself on a superb road heading north through dense forests. The area seemed seldom visited, as I hardly encountered any traffic or people. I was thus surprised and delighted to stumble upon quaint Bo Rai, which sported a lovely hotel and a 7-Eleven.

I also heard from my dear friend, Anil that he was in Pattaya. Since I had never managed to catch up with them when in India, and had promised to meet them in Pattaya, I hurriedly organised a ride back to Pattaya the following morning.

### **Bo Rai – Pattaya**

And, just like that, I was back in Pattaya. Seeing Anil and his friends was lovely, and we spent an evening socialising at the Beer Garden in Pattaya.

As Dawn was arriving in four days, I decided to stay put.



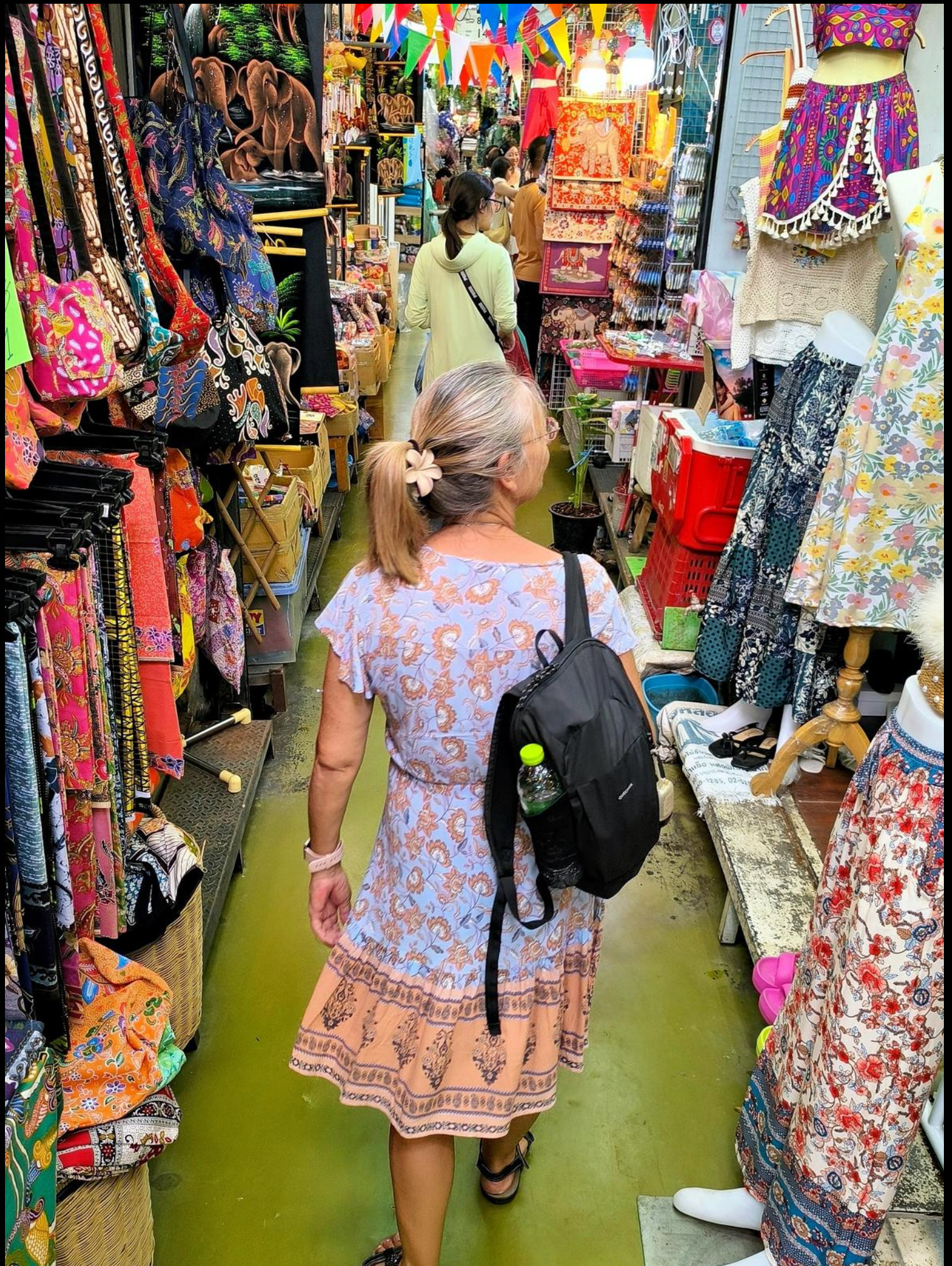
Dawn arrived on the 18th, and it was a fun month of eating, drinking, and catching up with everyone. We spent a few days on Ko Samet and, as always, a few days in Bangkok, where we met Luke (her son) just before they flew home. We had plans to do much more, but the days flew by, and very few of our plans materialised.

Once back in Jomtien, I waited for my second bicycle to be serviced and started packing my panniers for my trip around Asia. I packed, cleaned the room, and got rid of loads of stuff I had collected during my stay in Jomtien—none of which I really needed and surely not anything I'll lug around with me on a bicycle trip.









## **THAILAND (22.3)**

### **The Road North**

#### **Jomtien – Nong Khai**

#### **1 010 km – 16 Days**

##### **Jomtien – Khao Khan Song – 85 km**

It was 28 August before I cycled out of Jomtien. The day was anything but enjoyable, as I first had to swing by the Immigration Office to get a re-entry permit into Thailand to avoid losing my Non-Immigrant visa. This little procedure took the best part of two hours, and it was 11.30 a.m. before I collected my passport and got back on the bike.

Since I didn't have a specific route in mind, I headed north. However, the minor roads I chose were jampacked with trucks and construction vehicles, making them a nightmare to navigate.

Major construction is taking place in the area, and I couldn't find any available accommodation due to the rooms being occupied by permanent construction workers. I continued, hoping to find something, but eventually decided to call it a day as the traffic was downright dangerous. It took retracing my steps to where I saw a guesthouse much earlier in the day. Whew, it's time to look at the map again.



## **Khao Khan Song**

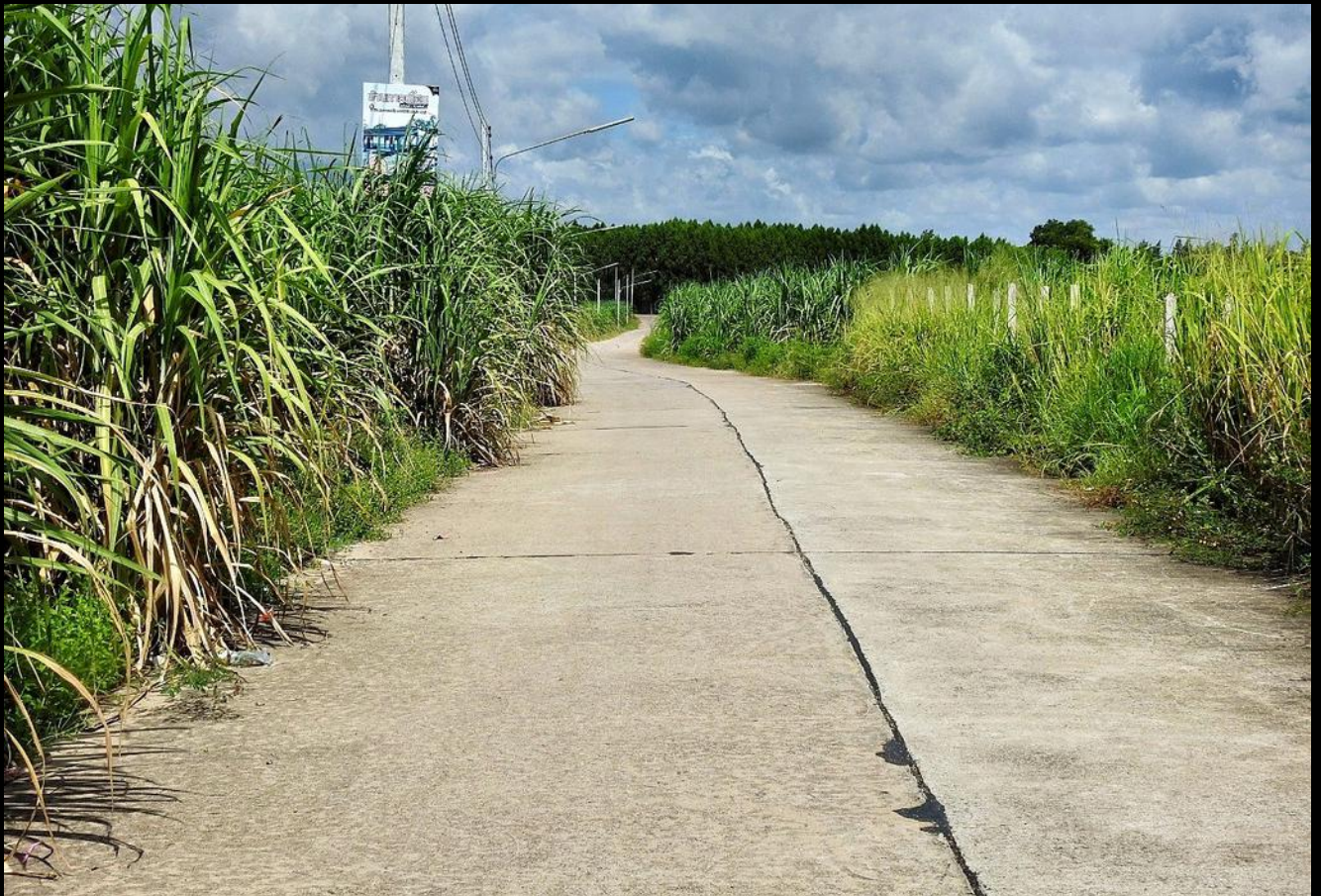
Even though I say Khao Khan Song, I am not sure it is the name of the town, village or guesthouse as everything is written in Thai. I might have left too much in a hurry as a few outstanding tasks remained. Fortunately, just about anything can be done online. Since I had the luxury of a room with a chair and table as well as a veranda with a resident cat, I thought staying put was a good idea. My online business took the best part of the day, and once everything was done, it was already 5 p.m. and I ambled to the supermarket for my evening meal and beer.

## **Khao Khan Song – Bang Khla – 84 km**

I saddled my old iron horse late in the morning and returned to the busy main road. Luckily, the road was new and had a generous shoulder almost as wide as the vehicle lanes. I veered off onto a smaller route only once, but my euphoria was short-lived as the path petered out.

I picked up a tailwind and blitzed it to charming Bang Khla, situated on the Bang Pakong River, without being rained on. That said, it started raining just as I cycled into town, and I pulled into the first available accommodation, resulting in my paying a tad more than usual, but I was rewarded with a lovely spacious room with aircon and hot water for \$14. At least I was out of the madness and looking forward to the ride north, as there's plenty to see with a good mix of natural beauty and cultural heritage.

While enjoying a delicious plate of fried rice, it dawned on me that Thailand has its own table manners, similar to other cultures in the world and, fortunately, the rules of food etiquette are pretty simple. Spoons and forks are the main eating utensils in Thailand.



Generally, in Thai, a spoon is called 'chon' and a fork 'som'. The spoon is used to put food into the mouth, while the fork is used to scoop and arrange rice and food onto the spoon so it doesn't fall off on its way to your mouth. Thai people mainly eat using a spoon and do not put a fork into their mouths. They don't typically use a knife much while eating Thai food, as most dishes are served in bite-size pieces, so there is no need to use a knife.

### **Bang Kla – Nakhon Nayok – 90 km**

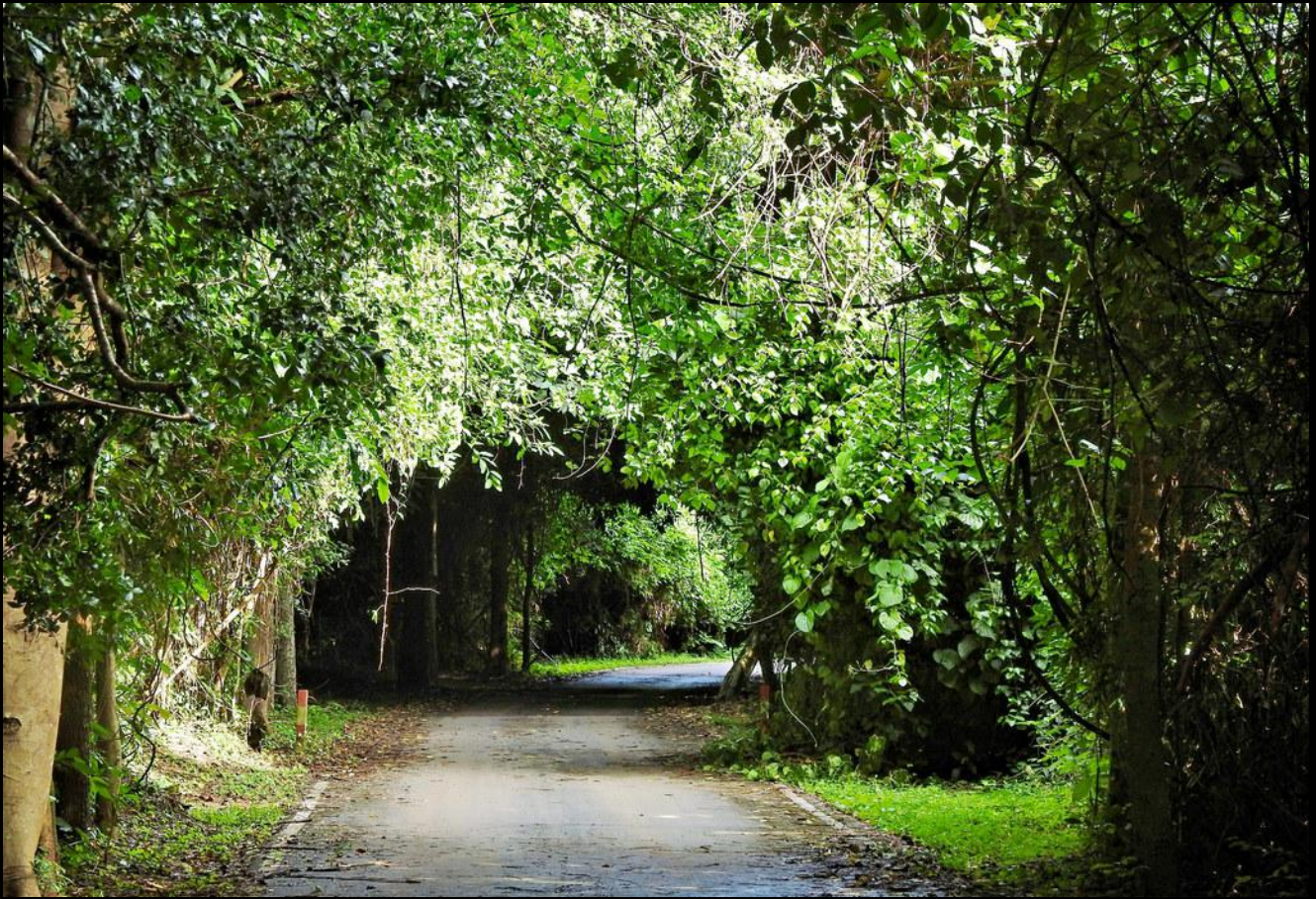
In the morning, I first cycled a few kilometres to Wat Pho Bang Khla, believed to have been built during the reign of King Taksin the Great (between 1767 and 1782). The temple's architecture bears the influence of the Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin-period. The most interesting thing, though, is the temple's resident fruit bats, which reside in the trees within the temple grounds.

Next, I visited the floating market, which isn't much of a floating market but rather resembles a food market on the banks of the river. My next stop was at Wat Pak Nam Jolo, another historical temple believed to have been built 200 years ago. From Bang Kla, a lovely ride took me along the Bang Pakong River.

Around midday, I felt hungry and stopped at a roadside shelter for a bite to eat. A very surprised lady quickly prepared a delicious meal of rice and spicy vegetables topped with a fried egg. All this happened without me speaking Thai or the lady any English. Hahaha!

Just before reaching Nakhon Nayok, I turned off to the ruins of the ancient town of Dong Lakhon. The area dates back from the ninth to eleventh centuries and not many remains of the structure except a well and a moat that surrounded the city. Still, it's a lovely area to stroll about.







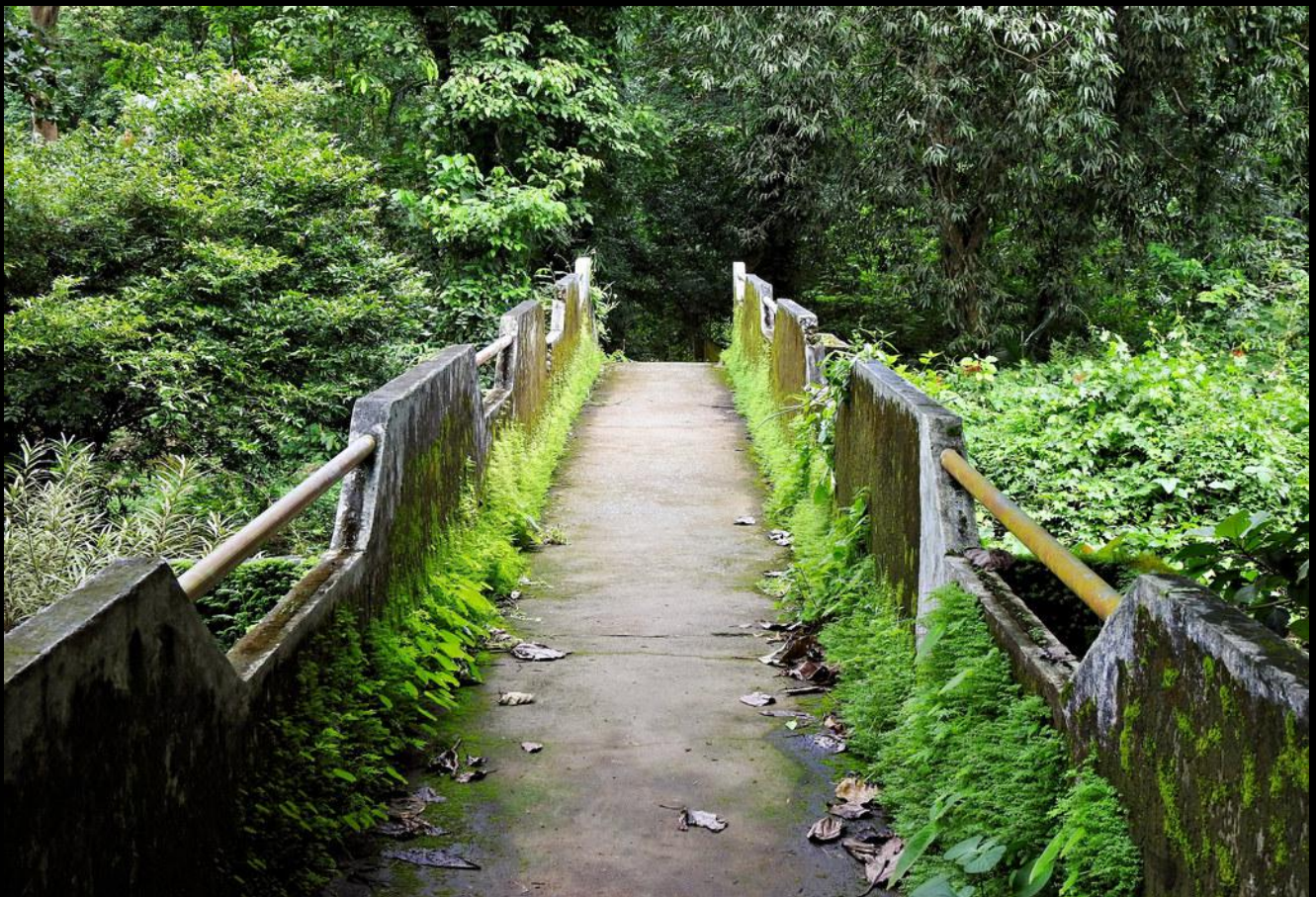
### **Nakhon Nayok – 50 km**

I decided to extend my stay for an extra night and ventured into Khao Yai National Park in the hope of discovering stunning waterfalls. The park is enormous, covering over 2,000 square kilometres. Not only is it the oldest park in Thailand, but it's also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Being a beautiful Sunday morning and the park's proximity to Bangkok, nothing came of my visions of enjoying my 7-Eleven sandwich next to a waterfall with just the soothing sounds of nature. Still, the area is undeniably beautiful. If I ever find myself in the vicinity again, I will cycle through one gate and exit through another - that way, I will see far more, and I'm sure it will be less crowded.

### **Nakhon Nayok – Pask Chonlasit Dam – 106 km**

I had a delightful ride along my chosen route, which followed the boundaries of the National Park and led me through small communities. In these communities, it seemed like all the women were either using a mortar and pestle or cooking up something delicious in a wok, some so potent it made me sneeze.







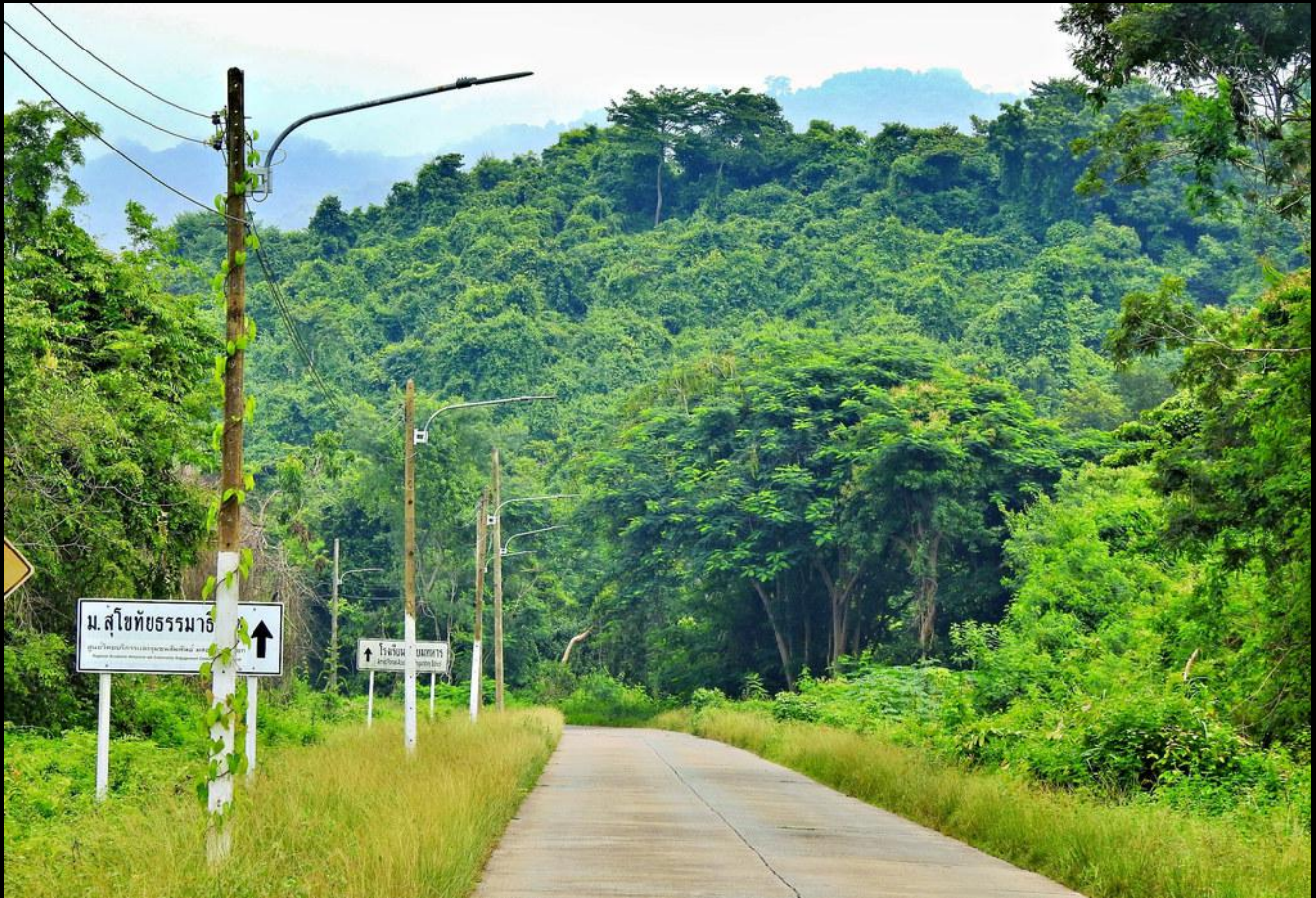
The road was lined with frangipani trees and the air was filled with the smell of freshly cut grass. I didn't have a specific plan or destination in mind, so I followed the signs to the Pask Chonlasit Dam. Since it was a Monday, there was only one other cyclist and a couple from elsewhere in Thailand at the campsite. They later came and asked if they could have a picture with me. It seems like I must make quite an impression! LOL.

### **Pasal Chonlasit Dam – Sa Kruat - 88 km**

I woke up early, as the other cyclist in the camp was up at an ungodly hour. If you've ever slept in a hiking hut, you probably know the sound of those plastic bags. I always want to ask, "What are you looking for?" Hahaha! Then he started listening to his music, which must have sounded quite soothing to him as he relaxed looking out over the dam. Unfortunately, sound travels very well in environments like that, so I was also up at the crack of dawn. LOL.

As I cycled over the dam wall, I felt immensely grateful to be out and heading in a direction I wasn't quite sure where it would lead to. My path followed the eastern shores of the dam, which was quiet with just a few motorbikes, herds of buffalo, a snake, and a large Shongololo. I couldn't wish for more. At midday, I stopped for a plate of fried rice, which is always an interesting affair due to my being a foreigner and, as they say, "only one."

When threatening clouds rolled in, I called it quits at the next village, which I think is Sa Kruat, in the Si Thep district. The reason for stopping there was twofold, as I was toying with the idea of going to the Si Thep Historical Park in the morning, but was still undecided.







### **Sa Kruat – Windy Guesthouse. Si Thep - 30 km**

I woke up early, feeling well-rested and decided to visit the nearby Si Thep Historical Park. This archaeological site covers the ancient city of Si Thep, which was inhabited from the third to fifth century CE until the thirteenth century. Si Thep was one of the largest city-states in the plains of Central Thailand. In 2023, it was added to the World Heritage List as The Ancient Town of Si Thep.

After visiting the park, I checked into a guesthouse across the road to do laundry and fix the slow leak in the back wheel of my bicycle. Later, I cycled 1.5 kilometres to a supermarket and unexpectedly got caught in a heavy downpour. I waited at a shelter for about 10 minutes before continuing to the shop in the sunshine. Weird.

There is quite a story behind my order of fried rice tonight. When the person running the guesthouse asked if I wanted food, I said, "Fried rice," thinking they might take orders there. Instead, he hopped on his motorbike and travelled about two kilometres to a restaurant to get the meal. He came back soaked but the food was still piping hot! I felt it was fair to give him \$2.5 for a \$1.25 meal, as where else in the world can you get a home-delivered meal for \$2.50?







## **Windy Guesthouse, Si Thep – Haus Luneburg, Phakdi Chumphon – 88 km**

I first rode to Wichian Buri to buy a new inner tube because I had discarded one and I like to keep two spares. The people there were incredibly friendly. They not only directed me to a shop where I could buy what I needed but also gave me two bottles of water. This was very helpful since I ended up needing more water than I had expected due to the heat and the steep climb.

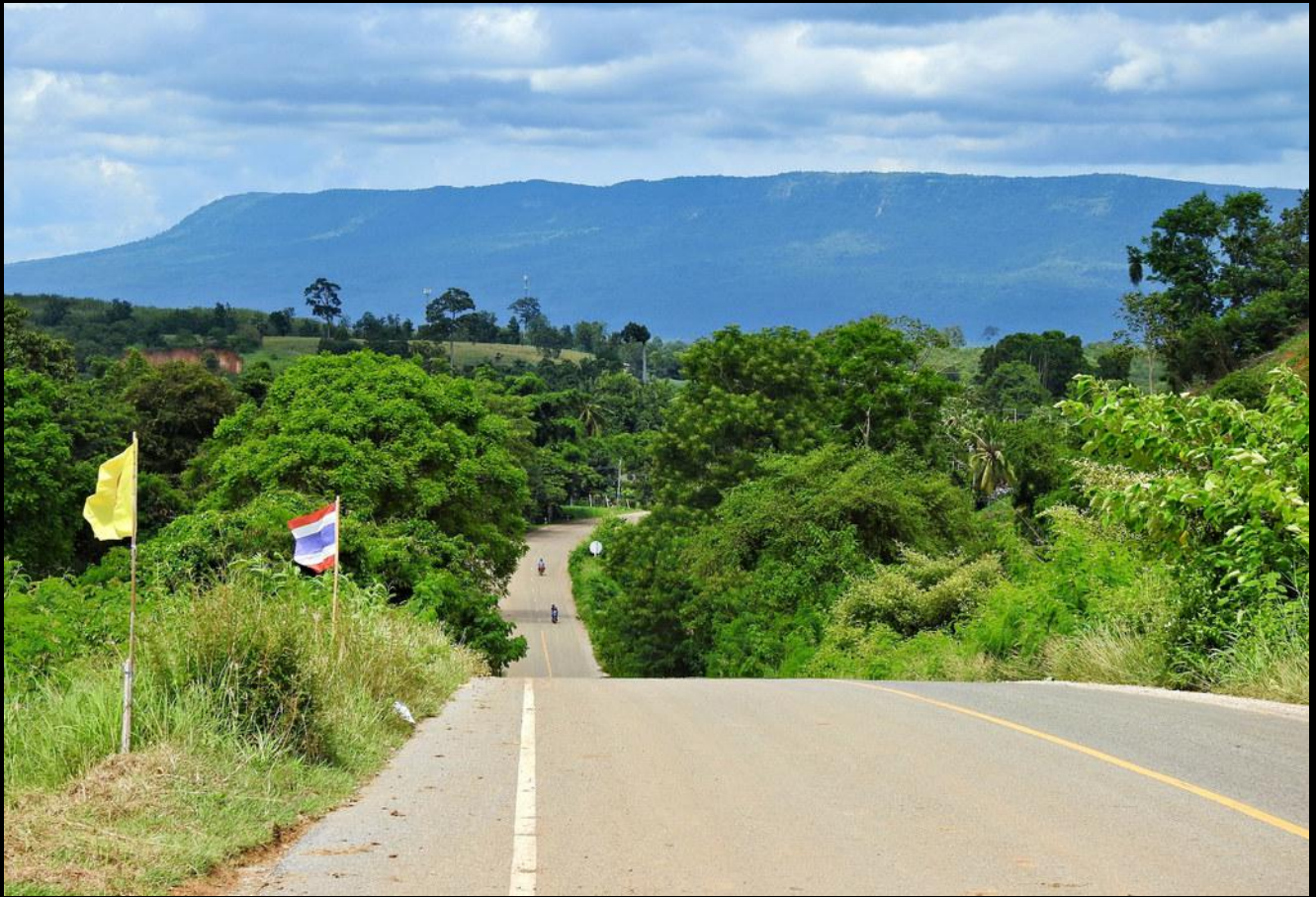
Despite the high temperature, the ride was amazing. I couldn't seem to stick to a main road, and I soon found myself on a narrow secondary road passing through small communities. After crossing the pass, I encountered an ice cream vendor and couldn't resist buying some. It was served with sticky rice, small scoops of ice cream, peanuts, and a dash of condensed milk!

Fuelled by the sugar, I sped down the road, where I came to a screeching halt at Haus Luneburg, a lovely guesthouse with a swimming pool. I didn't waste any time unloading the bike before jumping into the pool with a Chang beer in hand.

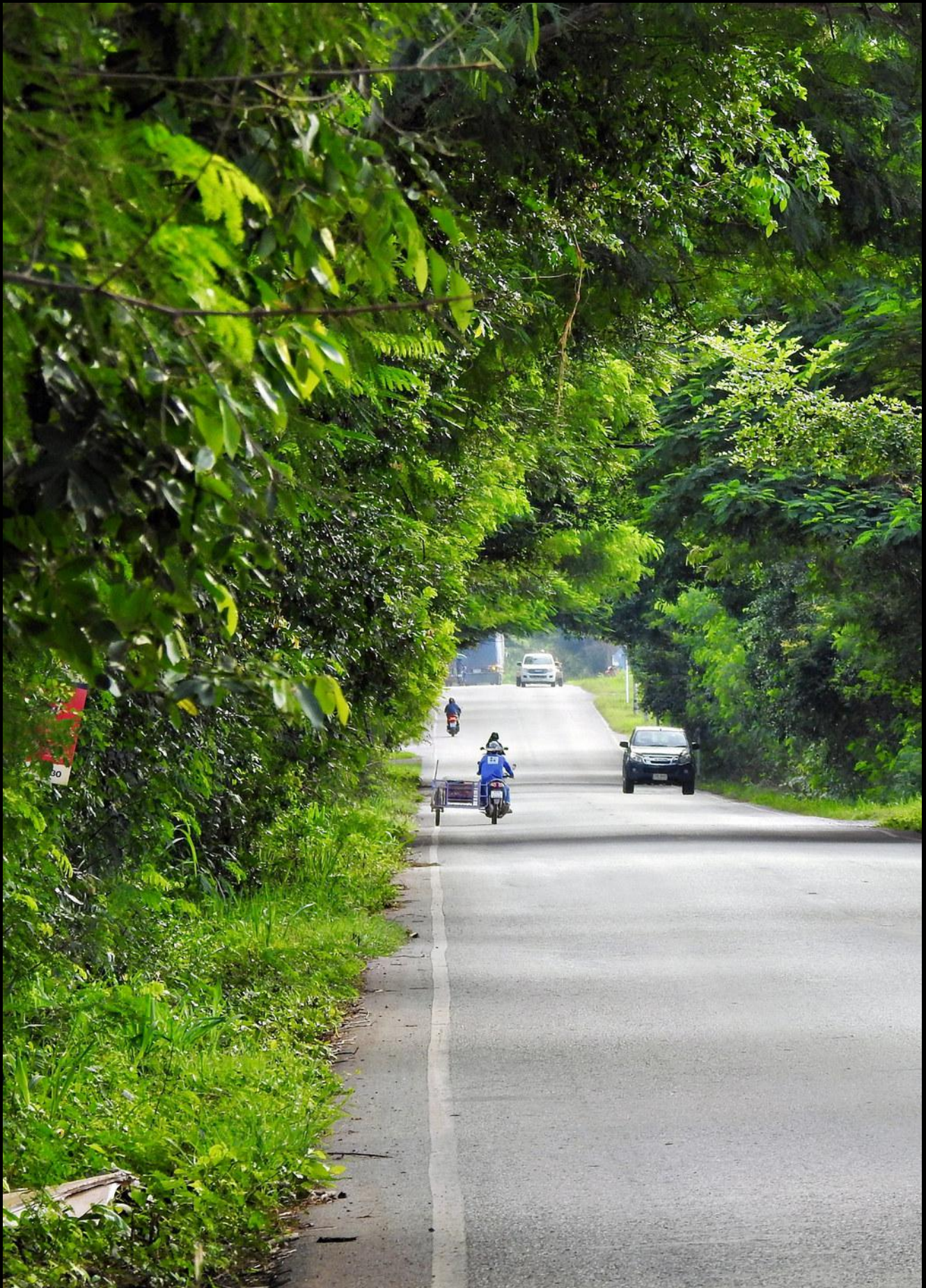
## **Haus Luneburg – Resort roadside cottages – 103 km**

Again, I was blessed with a stunning ride. Route 2037 has been an absolute delight to cycle. My path was littered with tiny hamlets, always with a temple, a school and a market. Midway, the weather came in, and in bucketing rain I continued as it wasn't cold. The rain soon abated, and I continued until spotting roadside cottages.

Even though it was early, it looked like more rain ahead, and I called it a day. Stopping so early also meant there wasn't much to do, and I did the dreaded laundry and went in search of a tap to wash the mud from the bike.







### **Roadside cottage – Khon Kaen – 110 km**

I think I wore a permanent grin today as it was yet another fantastic ride through the countryside. The weather was great, the rice paddies were green, the corn stood high, and I counted myself among the luckiest people on the planet. The kilometres ticked by effortlessly, and not even the village dogs gave chase. With a stiff breeze on my back, I ambled through numerous settlements and colourful temples until reaching Khon Kaen, where I planned to stay for two days to do the necessary chores.

The following day, I did the laundry at a laundromat directly outside my abode. Later, I strolled around the city lake, a pleasant, shaded walk past numerous temples. Afterwards, I cycled to the bike shop, which was a lovely surprise as it was well-stocked and professional. They adjusted the gears and also fitted an odometer.

By evening, I stopped at the night market, where I found little for vegetarians except some freshly made French fries. Fearing it wouldn't be enough, I also bought a pizza, which cost the same as my room. Well, if you want to eat foreign food, it's always costly.







### **Kong Kaen – Roadside cottage – 110 km**

I slept surprisingly well on the lumpy mattress, but what can one expect for 350THB? After getting up at six a.m., I was ready to roll at 8 a.m. and found the city far more substantial than I had imagined. The morning traffic was challenging, but I realised I was in Thailand when drivers stopped to let me across the road. Only in Thailand!

I soon found myself amongst the rice paddies with my music blaring far too loud. The ride was pleasant and interesting as I came upon the holy pond at Ku Ban Na Kham Noi. I learned that the structures surrounding the pond were used as a hospital during the reign of King Jayavarman VII (1177-1237) of the Khmer Empire. Then, I went on to the Cobra Village, but I didn't linger as I didn't think any animal wanted to be in captivity no matter how well they were treated.

Towards the end of the day, I veered off toward the main road, where one can find accommodation and other services. Once there, I found the road smooth as a baby's bottom and pushed on a further 30 kilometres, even though I don't like cycling on highways. When the weather came in, I pulled into the nearest guest accommodation and was pleased to find a cute 350THB bungalow. No lumpy mattress, and with air-con, fan, two bottles of water and clean bedding, I called it a bargain!







### **Roadside cottage - Ban Daeng - 100 km**

I headed through the countryside and came upon a multitude of fascinating sites. Shortly after leaving, the map indicated a Monkey Park, and I investigated only to find an ordinary city park with outdoor gym equipment and volleyball courts overrun by monkeys. LOL. I don't think anyone is using it, as the monkeys were a menace, and I didn't dare leave the bike. So, it is a very aptly named Monkey Park.

Not much further was a large lake known as the Red Lotus Lake. I didn't see any red lotus flowers; maybe their time was over, or there wasn't enough water in the lake. Still, it was a peaceful ride along its shores and through rural villages where fishing seemed to be the main occupation.

Thirty kilometres or so later, I stumbled upon the remarkable Ban Chiang. The Ban Chiang Archaeological Site is a prehistoric human habitation and burial site. It is considered to be the most important prehistoric settlement discovered in Southeast Asia so far, marking the beginning and showing the development of the wet-rice culture typical of the region. The site has been dated by scientific chronometric means, which have established that the site was continuously occupied from 1495 BC until c. 900BC., making it the earliest scientifically dated prehistoric farming and habitation site in Southeast Asia known at the time of inscription onto the World Heritage List.







After leaving Ban Chiang, I made my way north toward the Laos border. My presence created quite a stir, and I had a distinct feeling that the area was seldom visited by foreigners. This was such a rural area that I never spotted any accommodation, and when it started raining, I pulled into the nearest Buddhist temple, where I asked if I could set up my tent. I was pointed to a large, covered area, and no sooner was the tent up and the lady monks started chanting. What a pleasant way to spend an evening.

### **Ban Daeng Temple – Nong Khai – 62 km**

At three o'clock in the morning, the nuns were rummaging through their meagre belongings and by four, the chanting was in full swing. LOL. I was on the road by six, I'm sure it's a record!

My first stop was at one of the food vendors, which is always an interesting experience. Riding was a wet affair, but I still reached Nong Khai before midday. My abode of choice was Mud Mee Guesthouse, a well-kept and inexpensive place right on the Mekong River. The guesthouse also has a lovely garden restaurant and coffee shop, and I paid for two nights as I felt tired. I did little of note for the rest of the day and, by evening, had a beer and a vegetarian green curry at the restaurant. A massive storm came in at night with loud thunder that shook the building! I was mighty pleased I wasn't camping.

I slept in and, in the late morning, sauntered to the nearby supermarket to get a few items I may need in Laos. The day flew by, and I did nothing but stroll along the riverfront and watch the mighty Mekong flow by.







## About this Blog

This blog documents my visit to Thailand en route to Laos. There are numerous roads, and the route described in this blog is not necessarily the best. If you intend to use this book 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. I always noted the kilometres travelled, which might have included detours such as going to the market or searching for accommodation.

### **Time of year and date**

This blog is an account of my visit to Thailand in July and September 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, and the hills I climbed may or may not have been as steep as I described them. But one thing is for sure: they certainly felt like a challenge during my visit.

### **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. The weather in Thailand can be sweltering throughout the year, 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 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 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 Thailand** (Please refer to the Internet or your favourite travel guide for a more in-depth overview)

### **Capital City**

Bangkok, the capital, is nicknamed the Big Mango. It is a modern, sprawling, high-tech city that offers everything a capital city expects to provide.

### **Currency**

The currency is the Thai Baht. The code is TBH and the symbol ฿.

### **Language**

Thai, or more specifically, Siamese Thai, is the only official language of Thailand, spoken by over eighty per cent of the country's sixty-three million people.

### **Religion**

Excluding the law that states the King must be Buddhist, there is no official Thai religion, meaning all Thai people enjoy religious freedom. However, Buddhism is the most common religion in Thailand, with approximately 95% of the population following this Theravada religion.

### **Location and size**

Thailand measures 514,000 sq km in Southeast Asia; Thailand (formerly known as Siam) extends almost two-thirds down the Malay Peninsula, with a length of 1,648 km North to South and a width of 780 km East to West. It is bordered on the Northeast and East by Laos, on the Southeast by Cambodia and the Gulf of Thailand (formerly the Gulf of Siam), on the South by Malaysia, on the Southwest by the Andaman Sea, and on the West and Northwest by Myanmar.

### **Population**

The estimated population of Thailand was 69,297,372 (2019). The population density in Thailand is 136 per Km<sup>2</sup>.

### **Internet coverage**

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



## **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 spent several years cycling through South, Central, and North America. 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.





ibis HOTEL

SIS

กรสุวิ

กรสุวิ

**When travelling by bicycle, even the most mundane trip becomes an adventure.**



