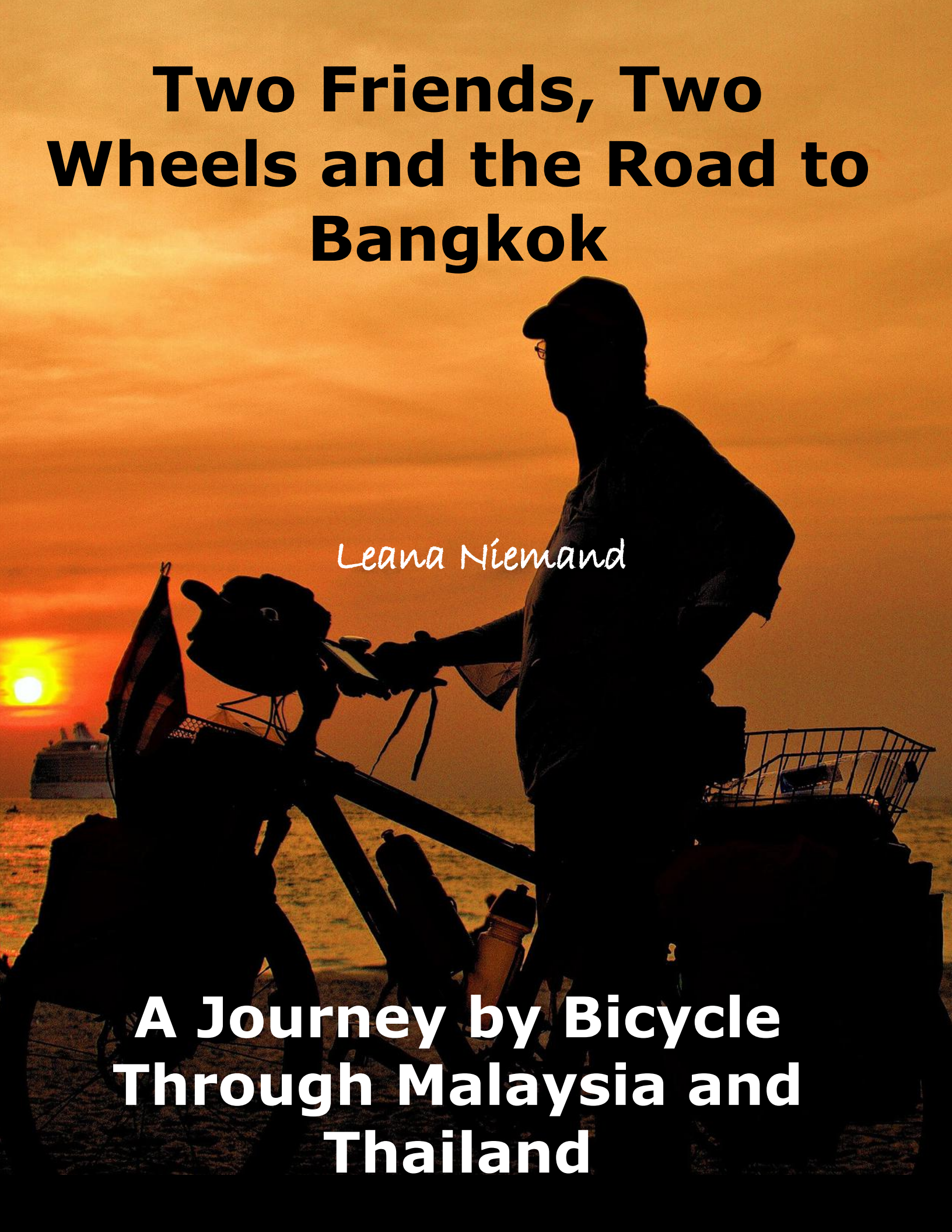


# **Two Friends, Two Wheels and the Road to Bangkok**

*Leana Niemand*

**A Journey by Bicycle  
Through Malaysia and  
Thailand**



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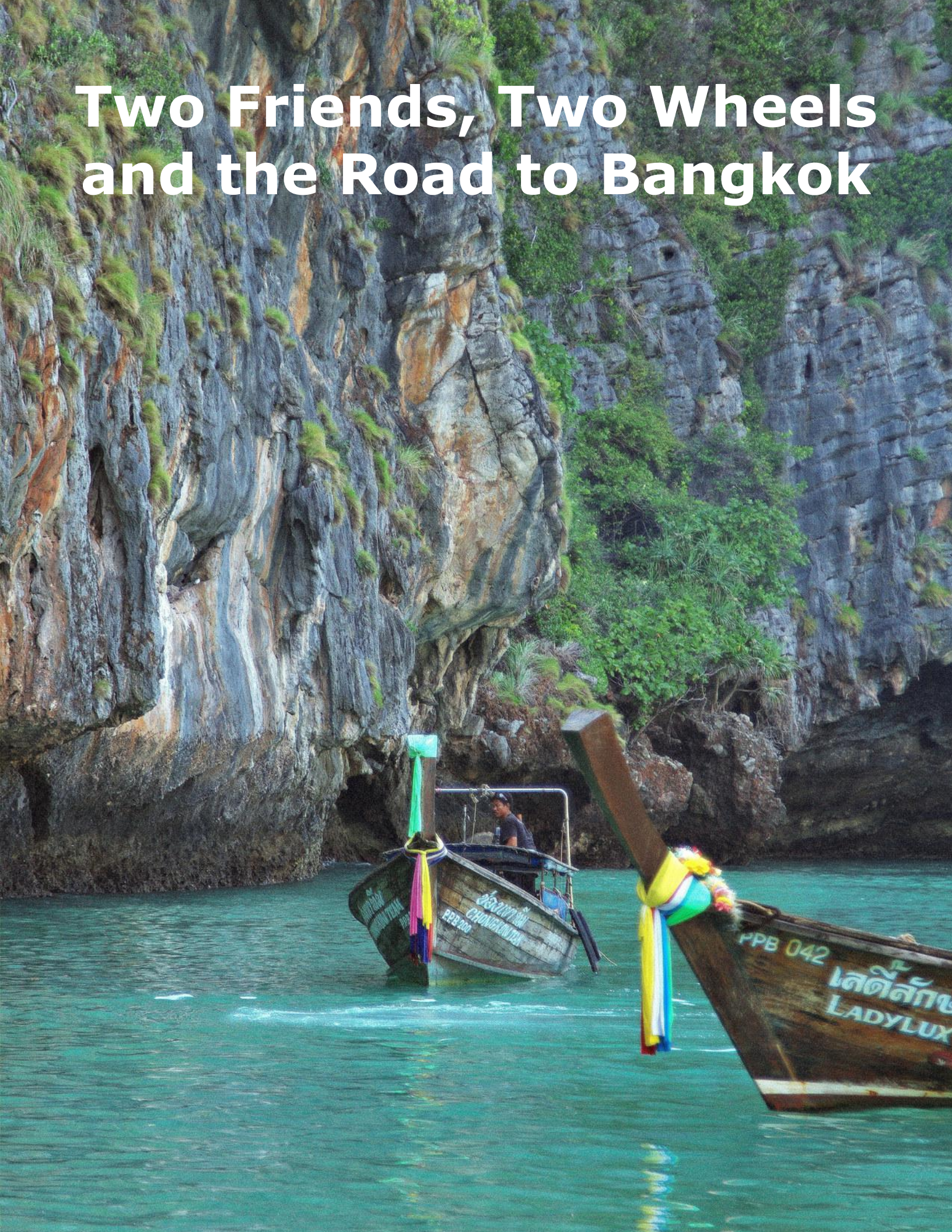
**Two Friends, Two Wheels  
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# Two Friends, Two Wheels and the Road to Bangkok





## **Acknowledgements**

My journey through Malaysia and Thailand was shaped as much by the road beneath my wheels as by the kindness we encountered along the way. To the strangers who offered generosity without hesitation — a cup of water, a place to rest, a moment of shared humanity — your quiet acts of grace humbled us and carried us farther than any map could show.

To my sister, Amanda, whose steady hands and meticulous care kept my scattered journal entries and photographs in order. You turned chaos into a record, and for that I am deeply grateful.

To my dear friend Val Abrahamse, who held the threads of my life back home while I wandered the world: your diligence and trust gave me the freedom to chase this dream without looking over my shoulder. I owe you more than these pages can say.

Thanks also to Janice, who trusted me to lead the way and for allowing me to use her pictures in this blog post.



# Two Friends, Two Wheels and the Road to Bangkok





# **Two Friends, Two Wheels and the Road to Bangkok**

## **A Journey by Bicycle Through Malaysia and Thailand**

### ***Prologue***

*Before the first kilometre is tallied, before the chain is cleaned and the panniers cinched tight, before the route becomes a line across a map — the journey begins in the body.*

*In the pulse beneath the sternum. In the quiet, private yes that no one hears. The road does not begin at the ferry terminal, the village gate or airport. It begins in the moment you decide to move.*

*And so we moved - for 1,425 kilometres, across 60 days of heat, monsoon, stillness, and surprise.*

*Across straits and coastlines, through incense-thick temples, past macaques, fishermen, rubber tappers, and the unchoreographed theatre of ordinary life.*

*Two women on bicycles, carrying more wonder than belongings, pedalling north through rainstorms, laughter, broken spokes, roadside kindness, and the soft astonishment of being alive in a world that keeps offering itself, again and again, in small, shimmering pieces.*

*This is the story of those sixty days. This is the length of 1,425 kilometres, lived slowly.*

*This is the road to Bangkok.*







## **Part 1 -Malaysia**

### **Across the Straits – Dumai, Indonesia to Port Dickson, Malaysia**

I woke to the warm, comforting aroma of an Indonesian breakfast drifting through the room — a small, fragrant promise that the day would begin well. Energised, I hopped onto my bicycle and pedalled the short distance to the ferry office. I arrived far too early, but eagerness has its own logic; I was ready to check in, ready to begin whatever the day intended to offer.

As the hour crept toward eleven, the weather shifted with theatrical suddenness. The sky darkened, the wind stiffened, and the ferry crossing over the Strait of Malacca became a wild, heaving ride. The boat pitched and rolled like a creature shaking off a foul mood, and seasick bags appeared in trembling hands like tiny white flags of surrender. It was a sharp reminder that the road — or sea — rarely cares for our plans.

By the time we reached Malaysia, storm clouds hung low and heavy, and the world felt blurred at the edges, softened by mist and rain. I cycled toward Kuala Lumpur through a landscape washed into watercolour — greys, greens, and muted blues bleeding into one another. When the Grandpa Hotel finally appeared, glowing faintly through the drizzle like a modest beacon, I surrendered. I knew I wouldn't reach Peter's place that day, and the thought of a dry, cosy room felt like the right kind of surrender.

Later, I wandered to the Giant shopping mall, where the fluorescent aisles glittered with abundance. It felt like stepping into an adult candy store — shelves stacked high with colour, novelty, and luxury. I didn't buy a thing, but the simple pleasure of wandering, of letting my eyes feast on the excess, was enough.







## **Reunion with the Yoong family, Janice's arrival - Port Dickson to Puchong**

Breakfast was humble—fried rice, fried egg, hot tea. Heavy rain had fallen overnight, but the skies had cleared, so I hopped on the bike for the eighty kilometres to Peter's place on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.

The ride was pleasant—smooth roads, no potholes—through oil palm plantations and past the Malaysian Grand Prix circuit. Fruit stalls flashed by, and a massive solar farm glinted in the sun. Somehow, I ended up on a toll road and twice slipped past toll booths unnoticed, making for a quick, comfortable ride to Puchong.

Arriving at Peter's felt like returning home. It was lovely to see the Yoong family again. That evening, we collected Janice from the airport—my excitement almost too big for my chest. Our long-imagined journey was suddenly real. She reassembled her bicycle with quiet determination, and I felt a deep sense of shared purpose and anticipation for what lies ahead.









### **Thaipusam at Batu Caves - The trance, the spikes and the climb**

Before dawn, we joined the river of devotees flowing toward Batu Caves. Thaipusam, celebrated by the Tamil community on the full moon of the Hindu month of Thai, unfolded like a fever dream—milk pots balanced on heads, bodies pierced with hooks and spikes, drums pounding like a second heartbeat. Men with freshly shaven heads climbed the 272 steps in a trance. The air was thick with incense, sweat, devotion. Hundreds of devotees ascended toward the cave—it was packed—one could hardly move. Unsettling yet unforgettable.

























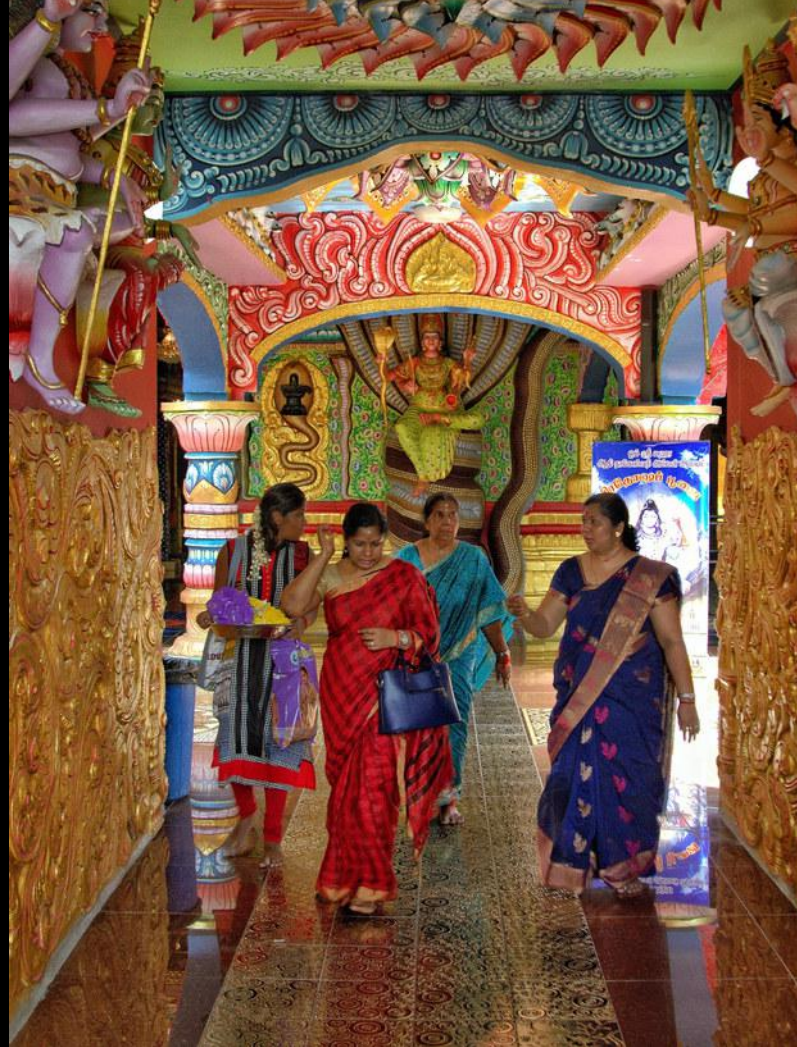
## **Puchong Temples, Lakes, and Last Lanterns of the New Year**

I ran at sunrise, legs remembering what they'd forgotten. Peter whisked us to the market, but first we stopped at the temple dedicated to the snake goddess Nagaswari Amman, shimmering, unlike anything I'd seen. Breakfast afterwards was a feast only the Chinese could orchestrate.

By evening, Peter, Alice, Janice, and I cycled around Putrajaya Lake—a delightful ride in a beautiful setting. Before returning home, we stopped for dinner, as one inevitably does in Malaysia.

Janice and I prepared for departure. We tested the bicycles with a ride to Tesco and picked up a few items for the journey ahead. It happened to be the last day of the Chinese New Year, and Peter arranged a Hot Pot feast. He invited a fascinating mix of people: two South Korean cyclists, Lina and Siew; their WarmShowers host, Rose; two British motorbike travellers, Maggie; Alice's cousin, Ginger; her mother; and my friend, Saras, whom I'd met cycling in Malaysia a year earlier: a great evening—good company, delicious food.

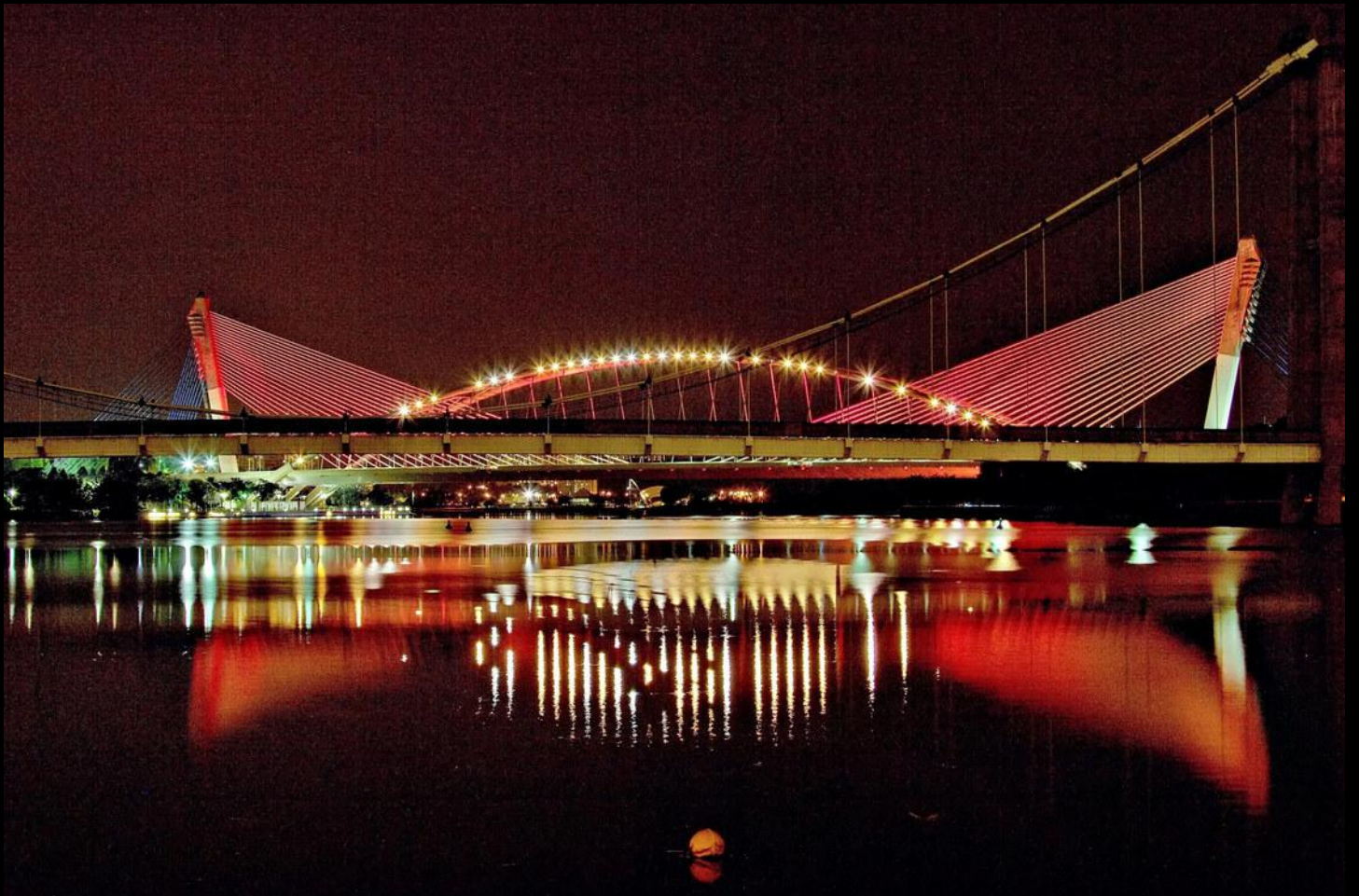






















## **The Kabins and the First Taste of the Road - Puchong to The Kabins**

Finally, Janice and I set off on our little adventure to Bangkok. Peter kindly accompanied us to The Kabins, leading us along secondary roads —pleasant riding on small paths past the remnants of Chinese New Year celebrations. Janice did exceptionally well on her first day, and we reached The Kabins early.

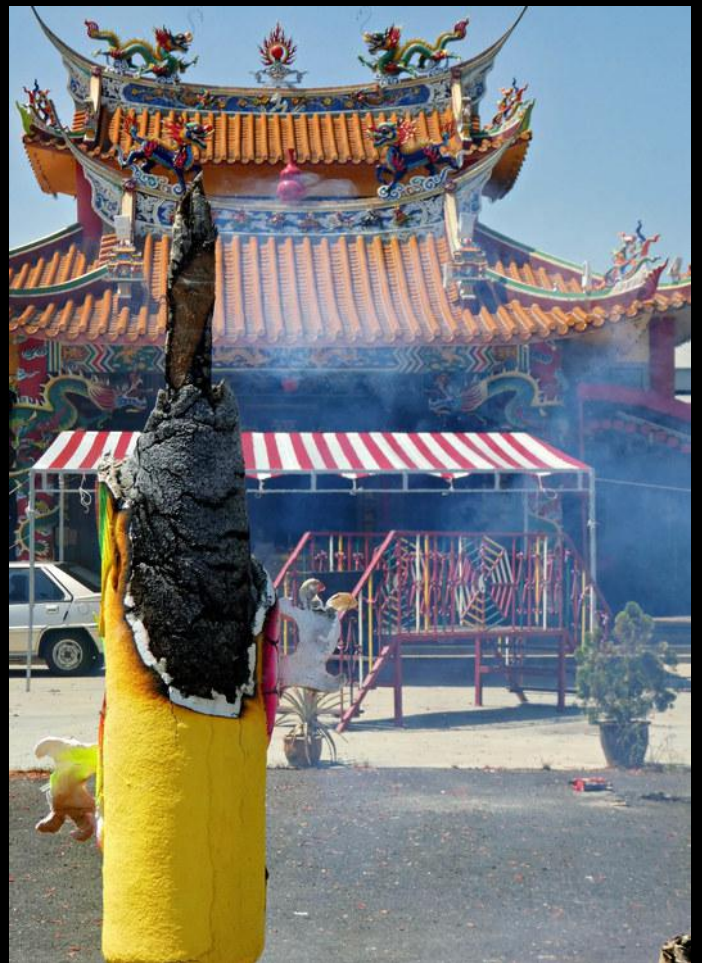
The Kabins offered a luxury night after our first ride: container rooms stacked around a lovely swimming pool. Air-conditioning, fridge, kettle, coffee, tea—everything we needed. Boiling, we wasted no time jumping into the pool. There's nothing quite like having a large swimming pool all to yourself on a tropical afternoon. We spent the evening chatting on our little veranda.

















### **Bukit Malawati and the Fireflies - The Kabins to Kuala Selangor**

We drifted out late, following the coast until the road vanished, dissolving into sand and scrub. We walked the bikes, laughing at the absurdity. Still, the ride was comfortable along a rural road through oil palm plantations, with monkeys darting across our path.

Cycle touring compresses life; so much happens in a single day, it's easy to forget the details. This day brought two weddings—exquisite outfits, multiple costume changes. We passed creeks lined with fishing boats waiting for the tide, and temples where joss sticks burned slowly, sending their heavenly scent to the spirits.

We rolled into Kuala Selangor early and checked into the Melawati Hotel. A short walk took us up Bukit Malawati, once the stronghold of the Selangor Sultanate: cannons, monkeys, fragments of history. I didn't feel well, so I rested while Janice visited the nature park.

Later, while searching for dinner, we ran into the Korean couple again and invited them to join our firefly trip. It turned into a magical evening—thousands of fireflies blinking like a living galaxy. None of us expected quite so many.















## **Punctures, Wishing Trees, and the Kindness of Strangers - Kuala Selangor to Sungai Besar**

We left Kuala Selangor along the coastal road, passing heaps of oil-palm fruit and iguanas stretched out in the sun like lazy emperors. Small fishing communities appeared one after another, their boats lying four-deep, waiting for the tide to return.

Then came the day's frustration: Janice's puncture. Not the usual kind, but a hole on the inside of the tube—rim side. Only rough spoke holes or protruding spokes could cause that. We filed edges, taped them, replaced the tube. It lasted 200 metres. We repeated the process—this time it held.

At Pantai Redang, a colourful wishing tree caught our attention. To make a wish, ribbons are sold at the temple and thrown into the branches. We didn't follow the ritual, and perhaps that was our undoing—shortly after Redang, Janice had another flat. None of our patches stuck. After four or five attempts, we ran out entirely.

There was nothing for it but to carry the wheel to the nearest motorbike repair shop. Mercifully, they had a bicycle tube. In minutes, we were rolling again. The tube held all the way to Sungai Besar, where we met Raja, a friendly cyclist with a generous heart. He showed us to a hotel, bought us a meal and a drink, and even drove us to a bike shop for rim tape, patches, and glue. His kindness was immense.























## **Trinidadian Folklore and River Crossings -Sungai Besar to Melintang Hotel**

Raja waited outside the hotel at dawn, eager to film us cycling. We rode along farm roads, laughing as he tried to capture the perfect shot. Along the way, we met Wim and Monique from the Netherlands, enjoying coconut shakes. They'd been cycling Southeast Asia for seventeen years, returning annually for a two-month ride. Raja left us to accompany them back to Sungai Besar.

Our path continued through coconut plantations, we stopped often, inspecting curiosities—one being the Kapok tree, whose fluffy seed pods are used for pillows and toys. Trinidadian folklore claims a carpenter carved seven rooms inside such a tree and tricked the demon Basil into entering, locking him inside forever. People say he still lives there.

Our rural path ended abruptly at a river, but a small ferry carried us across. Shortly beyond, a conveniently placed hotel appeared—perfect for leaving seventy kilometres to Lumut the next day.









## **Island Time and Blowfish Art - Melintang to Pangkor Island**

We didn't meander too much on what would be Janice's longest day since Kuala Lumpur. I expected a dull ride, but it turned out pleasant—hot, yes, but beautiful.

We crossed rivers of every size, from narrow streams to wide channels hosting massive ships. Chinese temples and Hindu shrines punctuated the landscape. Roadside vendors offered snacks. A bird seller showed us a curly-feathered pigeon—an odd, charming creature.

We stopped at a camera store - Janice bought an 18–200mm lens, ideal for travel. In Lumut, a ferry carried us to Pangkor Island. The Sea View Inn sat right on the beach, and we paid for two nights, well deserved.

We woke to a beautiful morning. I jogged along the beach, then jumped into the pool before breakfast. The morning dissolved into the usual housekeeping, and we hired a scooter to explore the island.

We found the remains of an old Dutch fort and a sacred rock carved with the image of a tiger holding a child—if one used imagination. Legend says a Dutch dignitary's child disappeared mysteriously; some blamed a tiger, others, angry Malays wanting the Dutch gone. The rock also bears symbols of the Dutch East India Company.

We circled the island in two hours—it's only eight kilometres across. Despite being a resort island, it remains a fishing hamlet at heart. A memorable stop at the blowfish man followed; he crafted hats, clocks, and lampshades from dried blowfish. He insisted the fish were accidental catches, already dead when found.

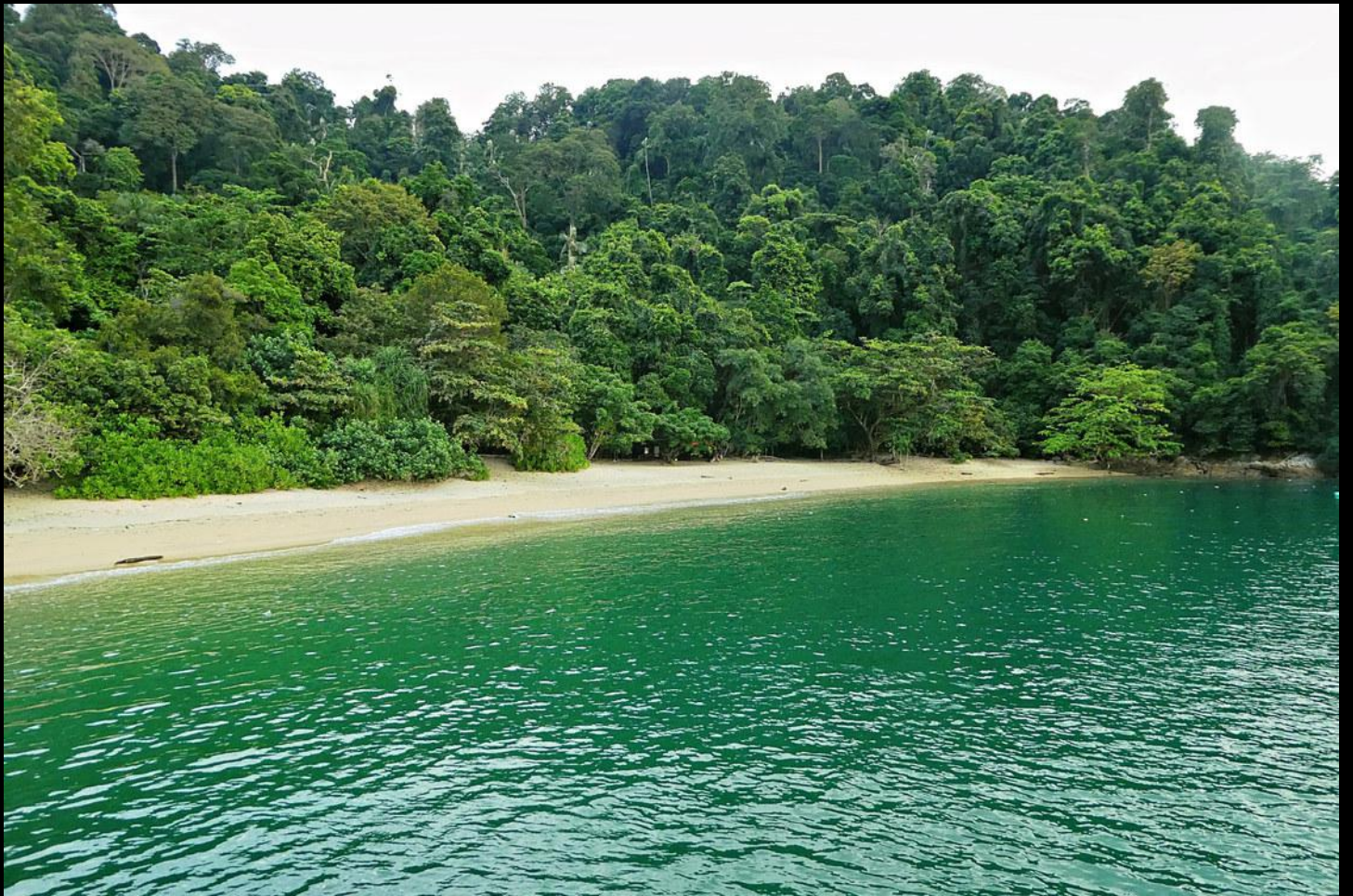




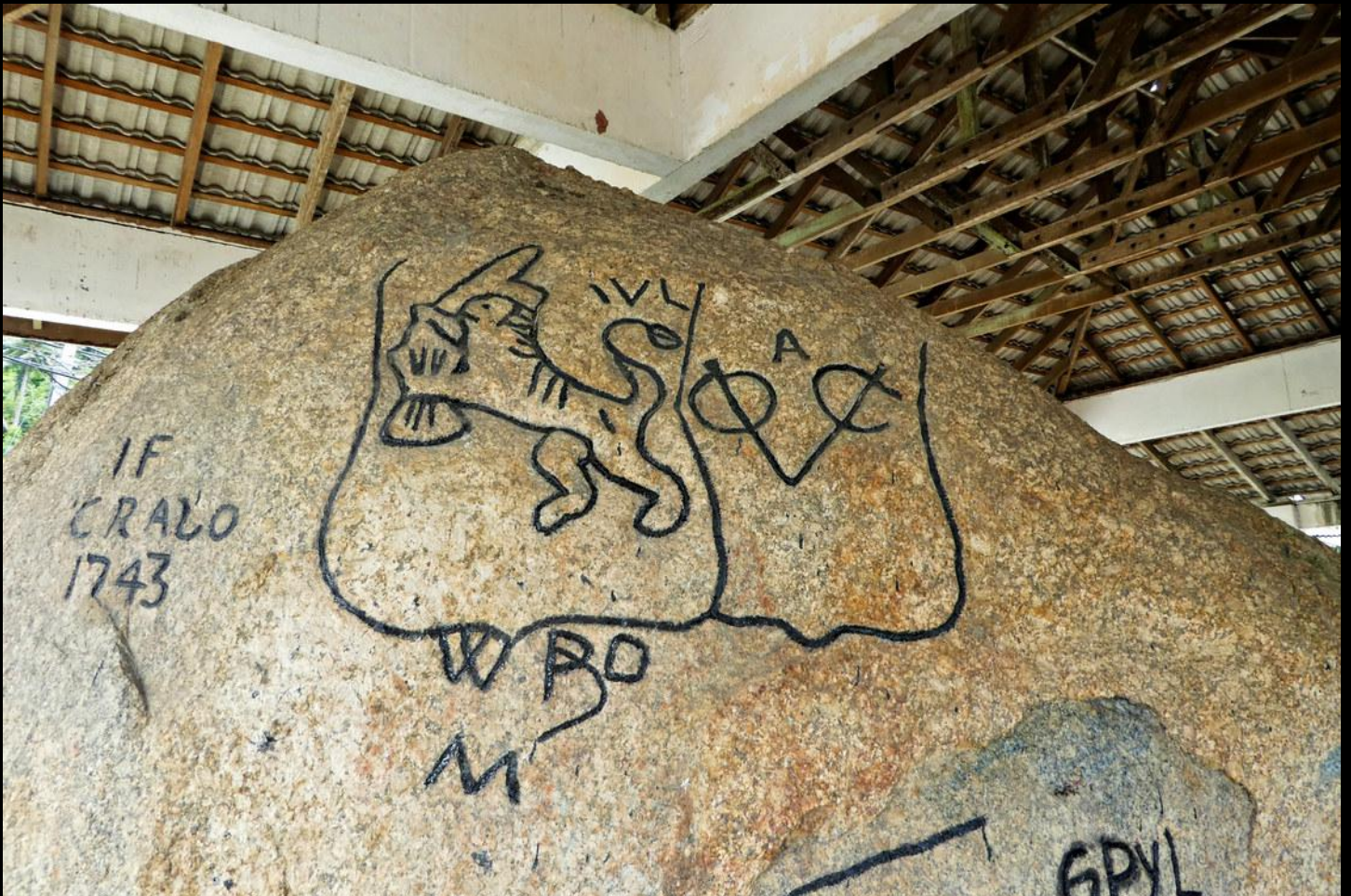


















## **Rivers, Curry Puffs, and the Road to Taiping - Pangkor Island to Pantai Remis**

By morning, a short ride brought us to the ferry. Back on the mainland, we faced a few technical issues: Janice exchanged her lens for a more compatible one, and her phone finally gave up the ghost. Unable to find a repair shop, she bought a new one. By the time we left, it was 3 p.m.

Still, the ride to Pantai Remis was easy—rivers, spirit houses, sugarcane juice, curry puffs. We checked into Pantai Hotel and later wandered among the mobile food carts. I settled on a soup with many ingredients; Janice chose a bag of fried goodies. The evening was spent setting up her new phone.









## **Spirit Houses and a Nightly visit to a Zoo - Pantai Remis to Taiping**

Rain overnight left the morning fresh and overcast. Our days had settled into a rhythm—ambling along, stopping when something caught our eye. We passed dense palm plantations overgrown with moss and ferns, piles of coconut husks guarded by spirit houses, and roadside stands selling food at dirt-low prices. Rivers crossed our path endlessly.

Kampungs stirred with barking dogs and crowing roosters. Residents called “hallo!” from behind banana plants, curious about where we came from. We stopped at Trong Leisure Farm & Resort for refreshments—chalets perched on a dam, peaceful and inviting. But Taiping awaited.

By evening, we visited the night zoo, wandering in the dark, listening to animals chew and snort—an unusual, slightly eerie experience.









## Street Art, Visas, and the Small World of Cyclists - Taiping to Penang

We rose early for the long ride to Butterworth. The main road wasn't scenic, but it was the shortest route. Janice kept a steady pace, barely stopping. It became her longest ride in ten years, she said, and she handled it brilliantly.

The ferry carried us to Penang, docking around 3 p.m. Despite being tired, Janice still had the energy to explore Georgetown's UNESCO-listed streets—its street art, its food, its charm. We even ran into Lina and Jihoon, the Korean cyclists. Small world indeed.

The next morning was for visas, laundry, and wandering Georgetown's historic lanes.



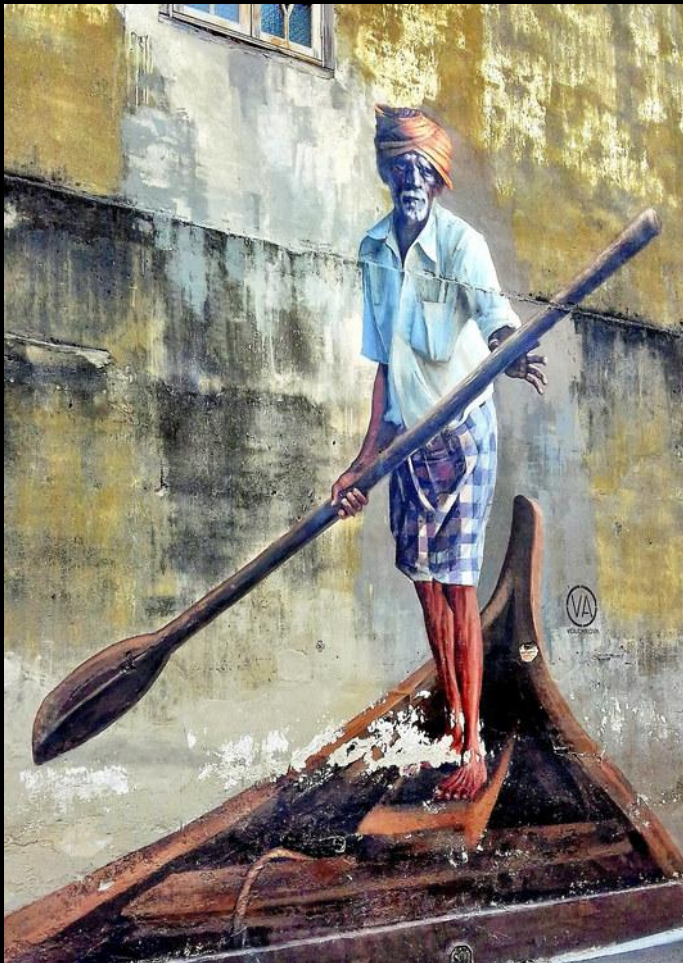






















## **Rain, Tea, and the Road to Langkawi - Penang to Pantai Merdeka**

We left at leisure, boarded the ferry to the mainland, and continued north. At first, we had no choice but the main road, but soon we found a smaller path—far better riding. In one small settlement, a friendly Malaysian man invited us for tea. He'd visited South Africa and spoke fondly of Cape Town.

Rain set in, warm but relentless. We arrived at Pantai Merdeka, soaked through, and surrendered to the resort's comforts. Clothes dried, spirits lifted. Janice finally found a non-spicy meal—rare in these parts.









## **Kinky-tailed Cats and the Ferry to Langkawi**

After breakfast, we rode to the waterfront to find a boat across the river. While waiting, we watched children play on the sand and befriended the village cats—all with kinked tails, a curious genetic quirk.

A boat arrived, sparing us a long detour. The coastal path beyond was beautiful—tiny fishing hamlets, farmland, scrawny cows, lush forests, distant mountains. After sixty kilometres, Kuala Kedah appeared, and a ferry carried us to Langkawi.

We took the obligatory photo at the eagle statue, then cycled the final twenty-two kilometres to Cenang Beach. Janice found a place with air-conditioning, a fridge, and a pool. Despite being tired and sunburned, we walked to the beach in search of dinner.

















## **Langkawi - Tourist Tides, Mangrove Rush, and a Sunset Worth Staying For**

Langkawi was swarming with tourists. Still, we joined a mangrove tour—more of a tourist conveyor belt than a nature experience. We were herded into a minivan, driven at breakneck speed, and loaded onto a boat that sped past cliffs and mangroves in a blur. Caves, floating restaurants, tight schedules—it was all rushed, but the scenery was undeniably stunning.

Back in the room, Janice discovered another puncture—again on the rim side. We couldn't fix it, so we bought a new tube. We decided to stay an extra night, a wise choice. We swam in the lukewarm ocean and walked to the beach at sunset, letting the day soften around us.

















## Part 2 — Thailand

### Crossing Borders and A Warm Thai Welcome

#### Langkawi, Malaysia → Satun, Thailand

The ferry wouldn't leave until early afternoon, so the morning unfolded gently — a jog through humid air, a quick plunge into the pool, the slow ritual of packing panniers. Twenty-two easy kilometres carried us to the terminal, where Malaysia released us without fuss. An hour later, Thailand received us just as simply.

Rain greeted us at the pier, a soft curtain over the twelve-kilometre ride into Satun. An ATM spat out a handful of baht — enough for a SIM card and a room at the grandly named, modestly appointed Pinnacle Wangmai Satun Hotel.

At the night market, the world was skewered, fried, rolled, and ready: bugs beside sushi, sweets beside soups. Even the fussiest eater would find something to nibble beneath the neon glow.









## **Stilted Homes, Jackfruit Trees, and the First Dip in the Andaman - Satun to Pak Bara Beach**

Barely ten kilometres out, a quiet country lane tugged us off the main road. Janice, ever patient with my detours, followed without complaint. The path slipped through villages where timber houses stood on stilts, smoke curled from open fires, and elders rocked in hammocks beneath their homes.

We pedalled past jackfruit heavy on branches, cows with long, floppy ears, and properties where mango, avocado, and frangipani trees grew as naturally as breath. Rubber plantations appeared in orderly rows, soothing in their symmetry. Tiny eateries offered noodle soup and conversation.

By late afternoon, Pak Bara Beach welcomed us. We walked straight into the Andaman Sea, letting salt water rinse away the day's heat.







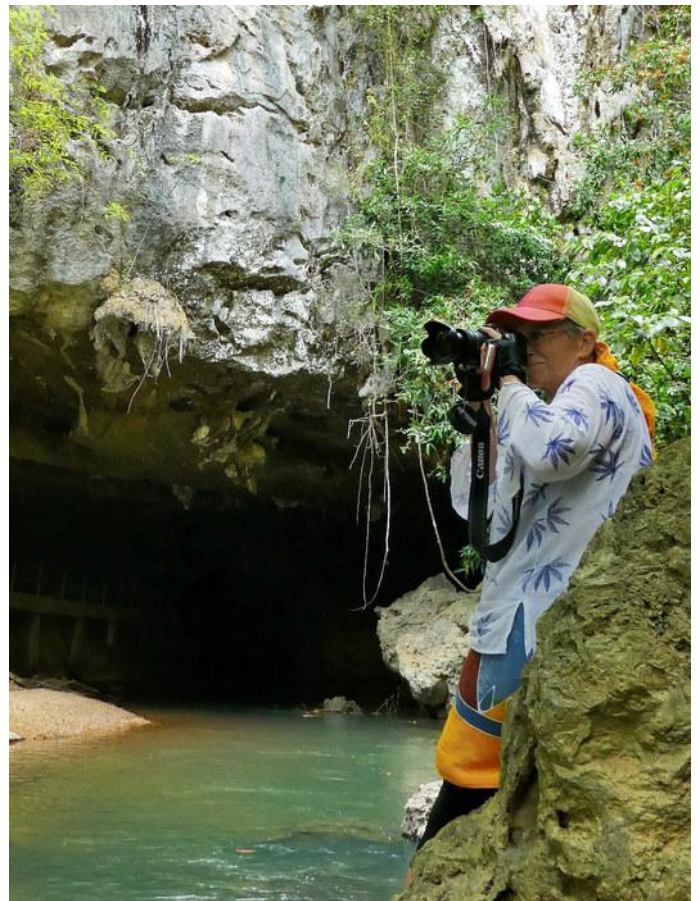


## **Karst Landscapes, Pineapple Hospitality, and Curious Eyes - Pak Bara Beach to Ban Thung Yao**

A late start followed my morning jog. Our route wound through farmland and rubber plantations, past temples bright with colour, beneath the watchful silhouettes of karst cliffs. Caves dotted the landscape, but laziness kept us from long detours; the few we explored were deserted or sealed by time.

A pineapple vendor beckoned us over. She peeled and sliced fruit faster than we could eat it, and soon the village gathered — word spreading that foreigners had arrived. Children were placed on our laps for photos, their parents laughing behind their phones.

Ban Thung Yao appeared around mid-afternoon, its Cupid Hotel charming but inconvenient: no twin rooms. At sunset we wandered to the market, where foreign women seemed a rarity. Every glance lingered, curious and unfiltered.

















## **Rubber Roads, Red Soda Shrines, and Pad Thai Rewards - Ban Thung Yao to Trang**

We followed rural roads shaded by rubber trees, watching latex drip in slow, milky threads from grooves cut into bark. Our first stop was a coconut stall, where the vendor hacked open young coconuts so we could scoop out the thick flesh.

We entertained ourselves by filming small moments. Villagers peered from doorways as we passed; even the dogs retreated, as if unsure what to make of us.

Shrines appeared at the edges of fields, each one bright with offerings of red soda. When land is cleared, spirit houses are built to shelter displaced earth spirits — not religion, just custom. Red soda, the spirits' favourite.

Trang arrived in good time. The Yamaha Hotel offered budget comfort, and we rewarded ourselves with Pad Thai — noodles, peanuts, egg, and the familiar warmth of a dish that tastes like arrival.















## **A Long Push North and a Rest Among Mangroves - Trang to Krabi**

We left Trang beneath a soft morning haze, pedalling past stupas and temples that rose like quiet guardians along the road. I hadn't intended to ride all the way to Krabi — the distance felt unreasonable — but Janice had other plans. She pressed on with a steady, stubborn rhythm, barely pausing, as if the kilometres were beads she meant to slide cleanly along a string.

The main road offered little beauty, but it was honest and direct. We passed homes where life unfolded in simple gestures: bamboo slivers drying in the sun, chickens scratching in the dust, cows tethered beneath trees. Ordinary scenes, yet comforting in their constancy.

By the time we reached Krabi, I was proud of Janice — 130 kilometres on a loaded bicycle is no small triumph. After showers and a wander through the night market, we surrendered to the cool hum of our air-conditioned room.

We stayed an extra day, letting our legs soften. A boatman guided us through mangroves and caves, his longtail weaving between roots like a needle through cloth. The tide slipped away while we were deep inside the mangroves, but his skill carried us out without fuss.

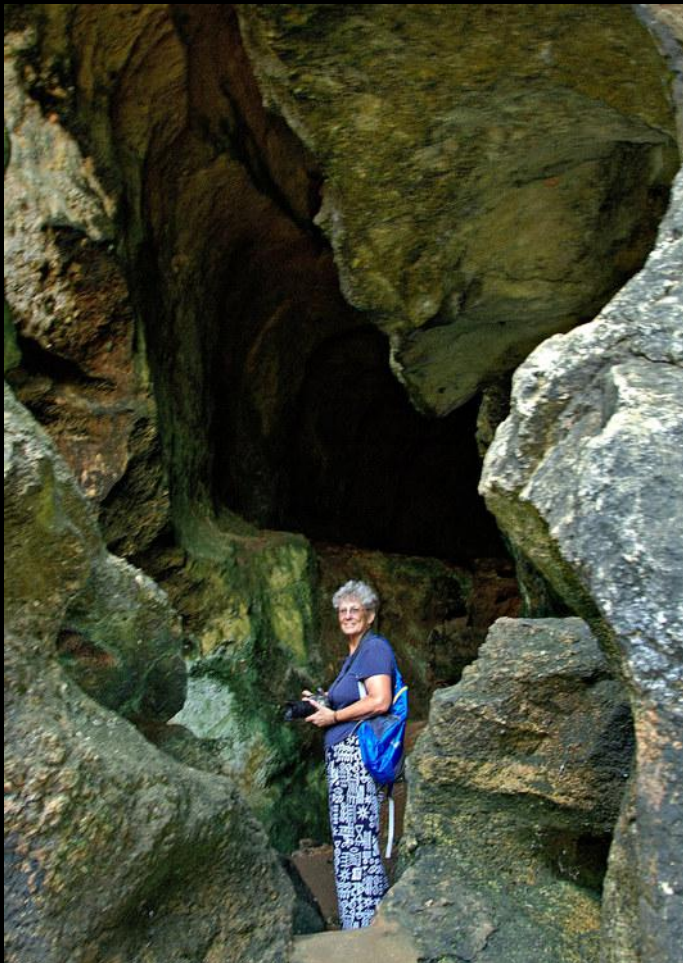














## **Karst Towers, Kayaks, and the Warm Blue World Below - Krabi to Ko Phi Phi**

After my morning jog and a dim sum breakfast, a short ride delivered us to the ferry. In less than an hour, we were transported into a postcard — limestone karsts rising from water so blue it felt unreal. Finding affordable accommodation was harder than reaching the island, but Sabai House offered the best balance of price and sanity.

From the moment we stepped off the ferry, Phi Phi swept us into its whirl: backpackers with sunburnt shoulders, neon party buckets, tattoo parlours, and the constant chorus of “You want massaaaaage?” We skipped the buckets and the massages, choosing instead the quiet logic of the sea.

A kayak carried us around the bay for hours, our paddles slicing through water clear enough to see the shadows of fish beneath us. Later, we prepared for a night out, though the island’s energy felt like it might outlast us.

The next morning came early — a two-tank scuba dive in warm, glassy water. Visibility stretched far; fish drifted around us like confetti. Swim-throughs beckoned, and we followed, weightless and content. Back on land, we still had time for a half-day snorkelling trip. The return at sunset — sky aflame, sea turning molten — was pure magic.

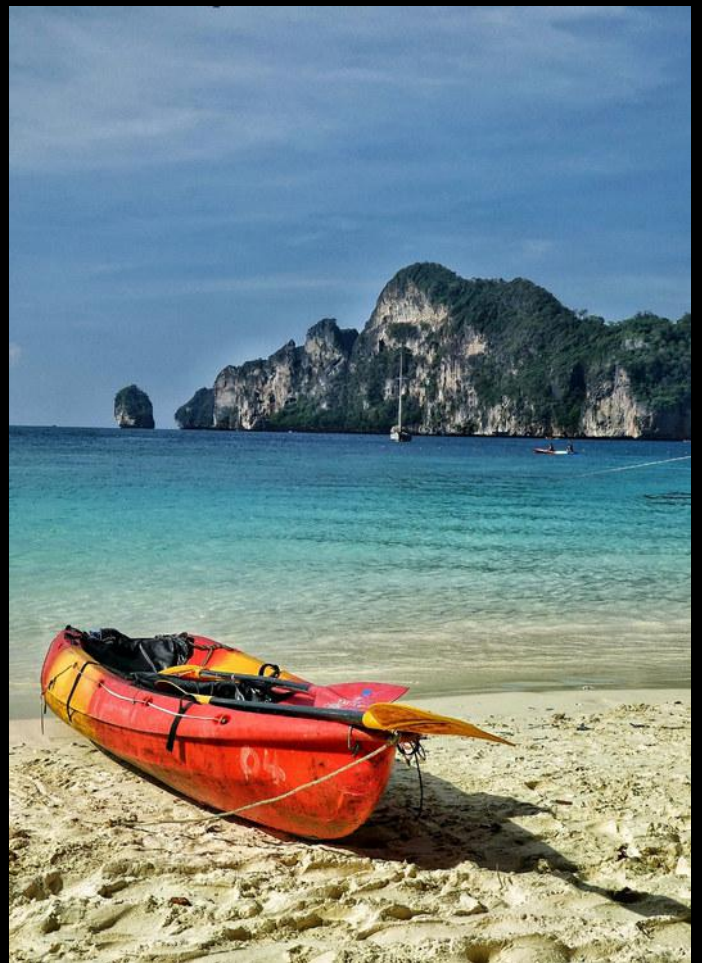






















## **From Island Paradise to Neon Nights - Phi Phi to Patong Beach, Phuket**

The ferry to Phuket left at 14h00, granting us a slow, lazy morning. By the time we arrived at 18h00, only a steep hill separated us from Patong Beach. We crested it in fading light and found a room in the heart of the chaos.

Patong is unapologetic: sex tourism, neon bars, tattoo studios, and massage houses stacked shoulder to shoulder. The noise never stops. When I went for a run at dawn, the last partygoers were only just stumbling home. Some hadn't made it home at all — bodies lay asleep on the sand, mercifully above the tide line.

The day disappeared into practicalities: blogs updated, photos sorted, laundry washed and hung to dry.















## **Big Spiders, Bigger Hills, and the Long Road North - Patong Beach to Khao Lak**

The bridge linking Phuket to the mainland lay fifty kilometres away. Once across, we veered off onto a smaller road and were rewarded with a quiet ribbon of tarmac hugging the ocean. New resorts gleamed where pre-tsunami nipa huts once stood. The coastline was heartbreakingly beautiful — no wonder developers rushed in.

It became “the day of the big spiders.” Golden Orb Weavers hung in their webs like ornaments, each massive female attended by a few tiny, hopeful males.

The hills tested our patience. By late afternoon, Janice had reached her limit, but we still rolled into Khao Lak in good time. Fasai House offered a soft landing.









## **Brake Troubles, Hidden Waterfalls, and a Bungalow on Stilts - Khao Lak to Kuraburi**

Coffee by the pool set the tone for the morning. A bike shop fixed Janice's disc brake, but the day soon unravelled into mechanical mischief — I lost a brake pad entirely, leaving me with no rear brake.

A sign pointed toward a waterfall, but the path dissolved into confusion. Still, the detour was worth it — rural, quiet, and green, though relentlessly hilly. When Janice's brakes acted up again, we resorted to the universal mechanic's solution: a generous spray of WD-40.

Kuraburi appeared after five. Tararin Resort offered ramshackle wooden bungalows perched on stilts above the Nang Yon River. Our room was large, with a tiny balcony overlooking the water — imperfect, but charming.









### **Fixed Brakes, Hot Hills, and a Quiet Beach to Rest - Kuraburi to Bang Ben Beach**

A tiny bicycle shop in Kuraburi saved the day — new brake blocks for me, a proper fix for Janice. Relief washed over us like cool water.

We set off late, and the heat rose quickly. The road climbed and dipped through temples, forests, and small hamlets. Iced coffees kept us moving. By afternoon, Janice had had enough of the hills, and we turned toward Bang Ben Beach and the welcoming shade of Wasana Resort.

After showers, we cycled to the harbour for dinner — green curry for me, fish for Janice. Both perfect.

We stayed an extra day, letting time stretch. We cycled to the deserted beach for a swim, wandered to the pier in the evening, and watched boats resting high and dry, waiting patiently for the tide to return.







## **Forest Shade, Slow Miles, and the Comfort of Hot Springs - Bang Ben Beach to Ranong**

Morning light filtered softly through the trees at Wasana Resort, dappling the ground in shifting gold. After a slow breakfast, we packed our panniers and rolled back onto the road. The hills returned almost immediately—long, steady climbs softened by the cool hush of forest shade and the occasional flash of sea between the trees. Thailand's west coast has a way of making even the hard days beautiful.

We pedalled past tiny hamlets where chickens scattered at our wheels and children waved from verandas. Roadside stalls offered iced drinks, and we gratefully stopped at nearly every one. The heat pressed down, thick and insistent, but the scenery—lush, green, unhurried—made the effort feel almost meditative.

By afternoon, the road dipped toward Ranong, a town known for its hot springs and its nearness to Myanmar. We found a simple guesthouse and settled in for a few days. Ranong had a sleepy charm: steaming pools, quiet streets, and a night market where we wandered between stalls, sampling whatever caught our eye.

Our rest day was spent at the hot springs, letting mineral water ease the ache in our legs. Locals watched us with amused curiosity, but welcomed us with warm smiles. Evening brought a soft rain that cooled the air and washed the dust from the trees.















## **Drizzle, Noodle Soup, and a Town Exhaling at Dusk - Ranong to Kra Buri**

We left Ranong under a sky still heavy from the night's rain, the air warm and metallic with the scent of wet earth. The road out of town was gentle at first, winding past steaming pools and wooden houses where early risers swept their verandas. The west coast has a softness to it—lush, green, unhurried—and the morning felt like cycling through a world just waking up.

Rubber plantations stretched in neat rows, each tree marked with a small bowl catching the slow drip of latex. Workers moved silently between them, knives flashing briefly in the filtered light. Dogs barked halfheartedly from the shade, more out of habit than threat.

A light drizzle began, cooling us as we pedalled. We stopped at a roadside shack for noodle soup, where the owner insisted on adding extra herbs “for strength,” tapping her bicep and laughing. The broth was fragrant and restorative—the kind of simple meal that tastes perfect because the day has earned it.

The landscape opened into wide fields dotted with palms, distant hills rising like soft blue silhouettes. Traffic was sparse; the world felt ours alone. By mid-afternoon, Kra Buri appeared—a small, unassuming town with a quiet main street and a handful of guesthouses.

We found a room, showered off the day's sweat and rain, and wandered to the market for dinner. Fried chicken, sticky rice, fresh fruit—simple, satisfying. The evening settled gently around us, warm and still, as if the town itself were exhaling.















## **Triggerfish and Thai Hospitality - Kra Buri to Thungwualaen Beach**

We left Kra Buri beneath a soft grey sky, the air warm but gentle enough to make for pleasant riding. The road carried us through farmland and long stretches of rubber plantations, the trees standing in orderly rows like slender sentinels. Workers moved quietly between them, collecting latex in small bowls, their movements rhythmic and unhurried.

Traffic was sparse, and the world felt wide and open. We pedalled past wooden houses on stilts, dogs dozing in the shade, and roosters announcing their territory. Small shops appeared at just the right intervals, offering iced drinks in plastic bags—sweet, cold relief that dripped condensation down our wrists.

The landscape shifted gradually as we moved eastward. Hills rose and fell beneath our wheels—never steep enough to break us, but enough to remind us we were earning our kilometres. We stopped often, not because we needed to, but because Thailand's rural roads invite lingering. A fruit stall here, a shaded bench there, a curious villager wanting to know where we came from.

By midday, the heat settled in properly, thick and insistent. Still, the promise of the coast pulled us forward. The final stretch toward Thungwualaen Beach felt almost effortless—the air growing saltier, the breeze cooler, the horizon widening into blue.

Thungwualaen Beach appeared like a sigh of relief—long, quiet, washed in late-afternoon light. We found a room near the water, dropped our bags, and walked straight to the sea. The waves were gentle, the sand warm beneath our feet, and the entire shoreline seemed to belong only to us.















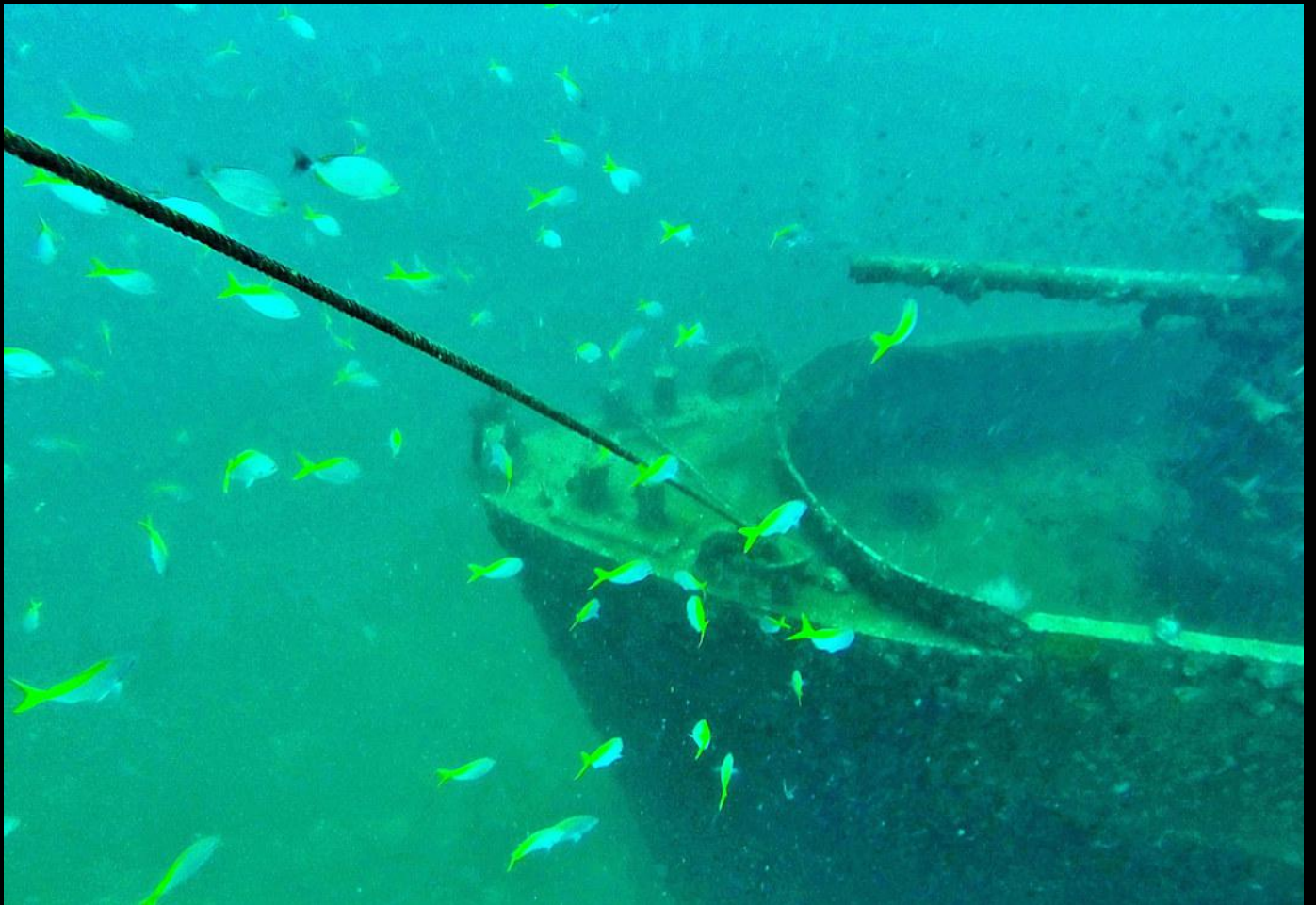
Dinner was at a simple beachside restaurant where the tables sat almost on the sand. We ate with the sound of the surf in our ears, the sky turning pink and gold as the sun slipped away. After a long day on the road, it felt like the perfect ending—soft, calm, and utterly unhurried.

We rose early, though not early enough to catch the sunrise over the Gulf of Thailand. Instead, we sat on our little veranda with steaming mugs of coffee, watching the morning soften into shape. When it was time, i pedalled to the dive centre, where the boat lay anchored in the bay. A rubber dinghy ferried divers out, bouncing lightly over the water.

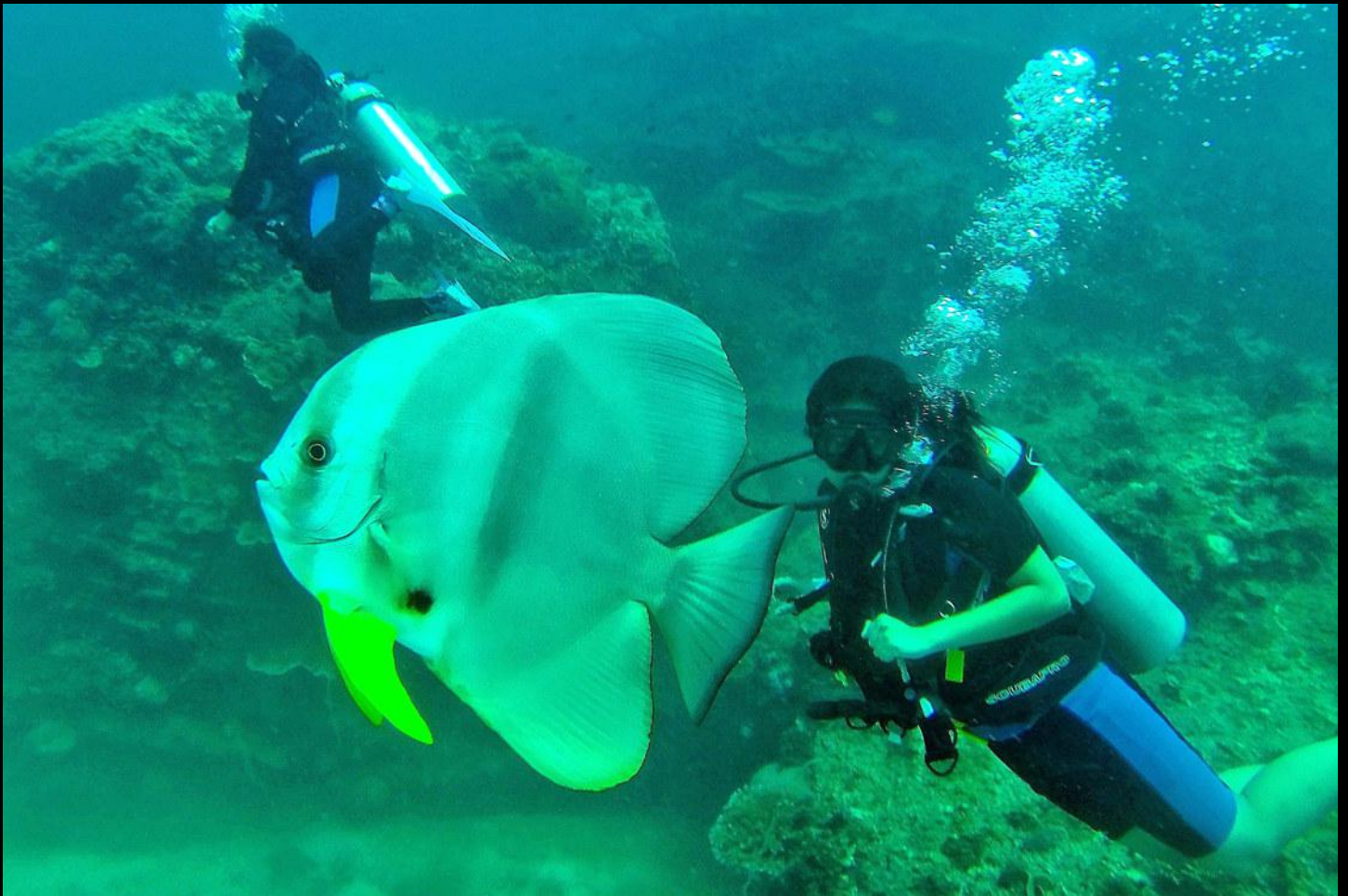
The first dive was just the divemaster and me; the others chose to snorkel. All went well until halfway through, when a Triggerfish shot out of nowhere and launched itself at the divemaster. He fended it off as best he could, but the fish kept coming—relentless, territorial. Then it turned on me, ramming my cylinder and trying to bite my hair, which, admittedly, is not a difficult target. The divemaster banged his tank to scare it off, and we kicked away from the reef as fast as our fins would carry us. The Trigger was clearly defending its patch.

Only once back on the boat did I notice the divemaster had a chunk missing from his nose. Have you ever. He returned to shore immediately, and I was transferred mid-sea to another boat. The new boat was a proper Thai operation—little English spoken, the food was deliciously Thai and the atmosphere warm. I did two more beautiful dives (even though I'd only paid for two), including a wreck dive. The visibility wasn't perfect, but being underwater is always pure joy.















### **Temples, Tiny Fish, and the Long Blue Coast - Thungwualaen Beach to Bang Saphan Beach**

After a jog and a swim, we cycled out of Thungwualaen. The day unfolded beautifully—part coastal, part inland, past colourful temples and villages where people dried nipa leaves for rolling cigarettes. The young leaves were laid out in the sun, then folded neatly into bundles. I wished I spoke Thai; there was so much more I wanted to ask.

A Naga Buddha temple offered a chance for photos, and the road carried us across rivers where fishing boats lay three or four deep, waiting for the tide. Villagers dried tiny fish on wooden racks, the sun turning them crisp. We passed idyllic beaches and a gorgeous coastal route with a dedicated cycle path—pure bliss.

Bang Saphan Beach appeared like a reward. We found bungalows across from the sea, and the heat made the ocean irresistible. Dinner at the next-door restaurant was delicious, and the bill—two plates of food plus beer—came to only 190 baht.















## **Brochure-Blue Beaches and the Art of Doing Nothing - Bang Saphan Beach to Ban Krut**

The coastline north of Bang Saphan is one of the most beautiful stretches imaginable—snow-white beaches, palm trees, lone hammocks swaying in the breeze. We couldn't resist breakfast on the sand before setting off.

A quiet country road hugged the ocean, the kind of route cycle tourers dream about. Not long after leaving, a guesthouse at a postcard-perfect spot lured us in. We surrendered without a fight. The rest of the day was spent doing almost nothing—swimming, resting, soaking in the beauty.

















### **Shrines, and the Monkey Lady - Ban Krut to Prachuap Khiri Khan**

Janice felt energetic, so we rode up Khao Thong Chai Mountain to its hilltop temple, arriving just as the first tour buses pulled in. Afterwards, we ambled along the coast, passing shrines, temples, and people going about their daily tasks—fishing in ponds, making charcoal from coconut shells, selling goods from carts piled high.

One shrine caught my eye: instead of the usual red soda offerings, it had bright orange bottles and colourful plastic flowers. A glass case beside it held silk garments, and a small wooden canoe with two carved figurines sat under a shelter. I wondered about its story.

We reached Prachuap just as the food stalls were being set up—perfect timing. Maggie’s Homestay became our base, a laid-back place where everyone stayed longer than planned. We spent the next day doing chores before visiting Wat Thammikaram, the Monkey Temple.

The macaques were endlessly entertaining. They’d learned to pry up brick paving to crack nuts, and one had found a shard of mirror and couldn’t stop admiring herself. Mothers cradled newborns tenderly while youngsters ran wild. The “Monkey Lady,” an elderly woman selling bananas to tourists, was a character in her own right—sharp as a tack and impossible to photograph unless you bought a bunch of bananas. A business genius in disguise.















## **Coconuts, Railways, and the National Park - Prachuap Khiri Khan to Sam Roi Yot National Park**

We packed up leisurely, waiting for the bike shop to open at nine. The coastal road led us through fishing villages, where we stumbled upon what seemed like a festival—or perhaps a funeral. It felt almost Hindu: music, dancing, mountains of food, and coconuts smashed dramatically. A “batsman” stood ready with a baseball-like bat, smashing coconuts hurled at him. I was allowed to take photos.

We turned off the highway and discovered a beautifully maintained railway station with manicured gardens. The stationmaster spoke no English, but the place radiated pride. Our route passed temples and quiet villages until we reached Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park. Baan Pak Rimkong Guesthouse, perched on stilts above the river with fishing boats moored below, made a perfect overnight stop.









### **Caves of Light and the Road to Hua Hin - Sam Roi Yot to Hua Hin**

A ten-minute boat ride carried us around the headland to Laem Sala Beach. From there, a steep trail climbed the mountain before descending gently into Phraya Nakhon Cave. A hole in the cave ceiling allows sunlight to illuminate the royal pavilion, but the sky was overcast, so we missed the famous light shaft. Still, the cave was magnificent.

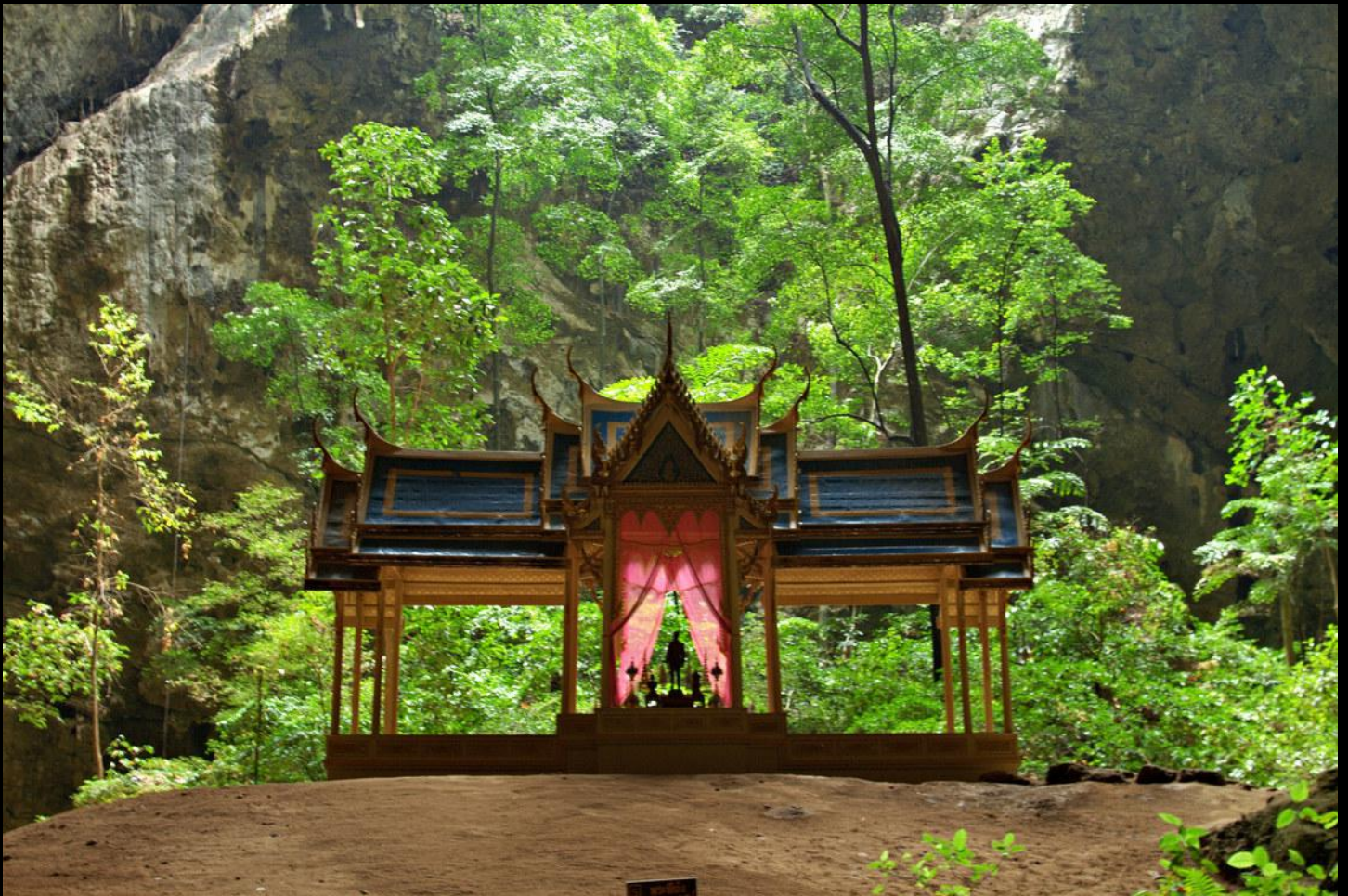
We returned to the bikes and followed a coastal route north. Shortly before Hua Hin, a cycle path made for easy riding into the bustling city. Tourists swarmed everywhere. Bird Guest House—a rickety place on stilts over the water—became our home. Its wooden deck was perfect for enjoying the cool evening air and watching the tide roll in.

The next morning, I jogged along the beach and dipped into the ocean, though the 30°C water offered little relief. Hua Hin's bike shop was well stocked, and Janice bought new cycling shorts, a pump, and a handlebar bag with space for a phone.















## **Salt Workers and the Heat of the Day - Hua Hin to Samut Songkhram**

We left late, as had become our habit. Cycling was easy and interesting, and although we planned to stop halfway, Janice felt strong, so we pushed on.

The Hua Hin airport runway crossed the road—mercifully via a bridge—but it was still odd watching planes land straight toward us. Our route followed tiny paths between salt pans until the path dissolved entirely, forcing us to walk our bikes back to the main road.

The salt workers were the day's highlight. Men and women of all ages carried heavy loads of salt in bamboo baskets slung from shoulder poles. Even children—no older than ten or twelve—worked alongside them. It was shocking to witness in modern Thailand.

We stopped for sugarcane juice, gulping it down greedily. Samut Songkhram greeted us with food stalls setting up for the evening. We headed straight to Hometown Hostel—my third stay there—and it felt almost like returning home.















## **The Market That Moves for the Train - Samut Songkhram to Kanchanaburi**

We rushed to the famous Maeklong Railway Market, where stalls spill onto the tracks. As the train approached, vendors whisked their produce and awnings back just enough to let it pass. The train crawled through, inches from baskets of vegetables and trays of fish. Once it was gone, everything snapped back into place as if nothing had happened.

On the road to Kanchanaburi, a kind man stopped and handed us a large plastic bag filled with water, biscuits, and flavoured milk. "You must be strong," he said. I wanted to reply, "Of all the things I am, strong isn't one of them," but I only smiled and thanked him.

We devoured the treats in the shade before continuing. Kanchanaburi offered bungalows at Rainbow Lodge right on the River Kwai—250 baht for a room with a sunset view. We unpacked and watched the sky turn gold over the river.

We spent the next day exploring the sombre history of the Death Railway. The war cemetery, with its endless rows of graves, brought a deep sadness. Humanity's greed for power has never known limits.

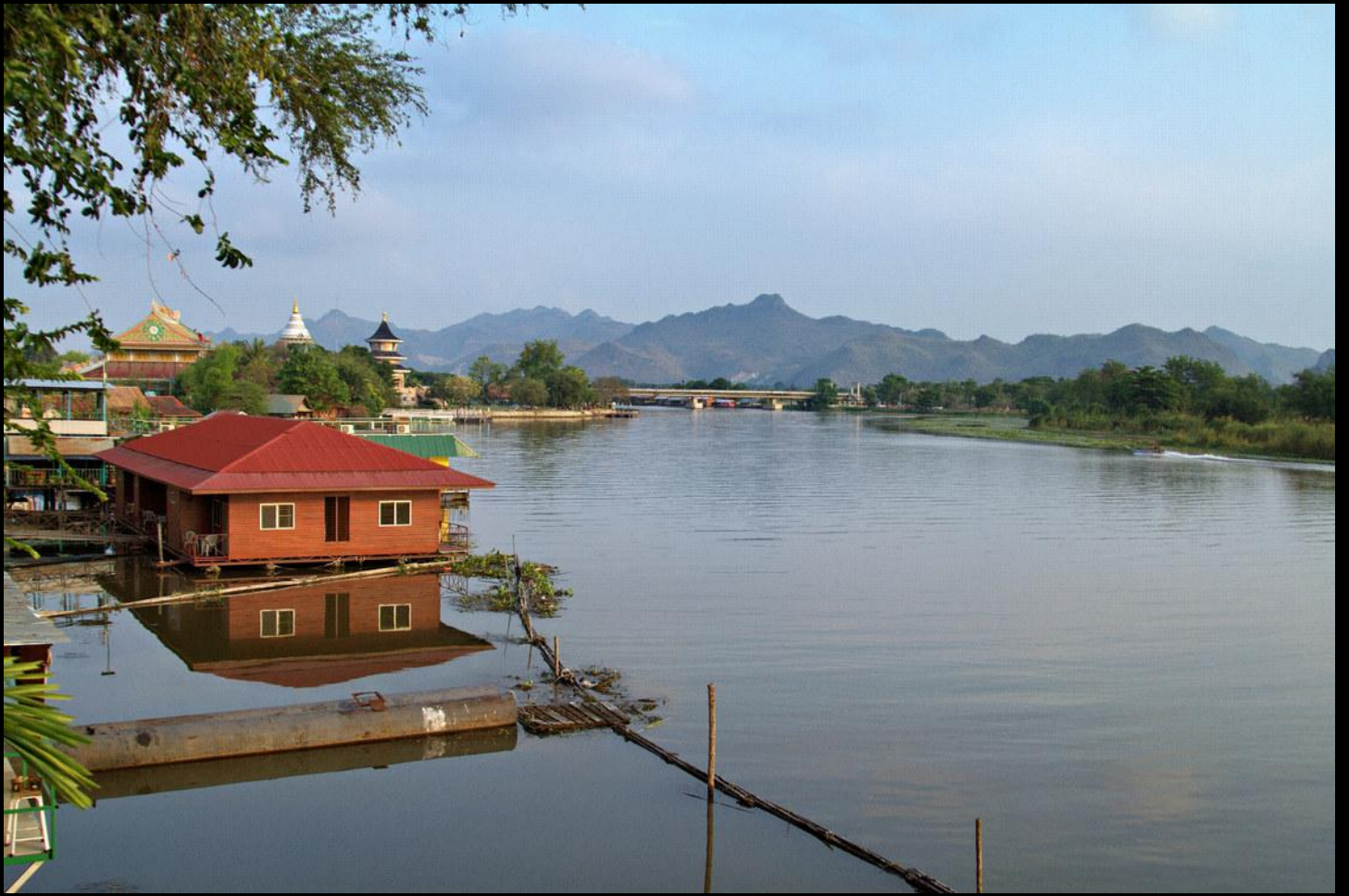




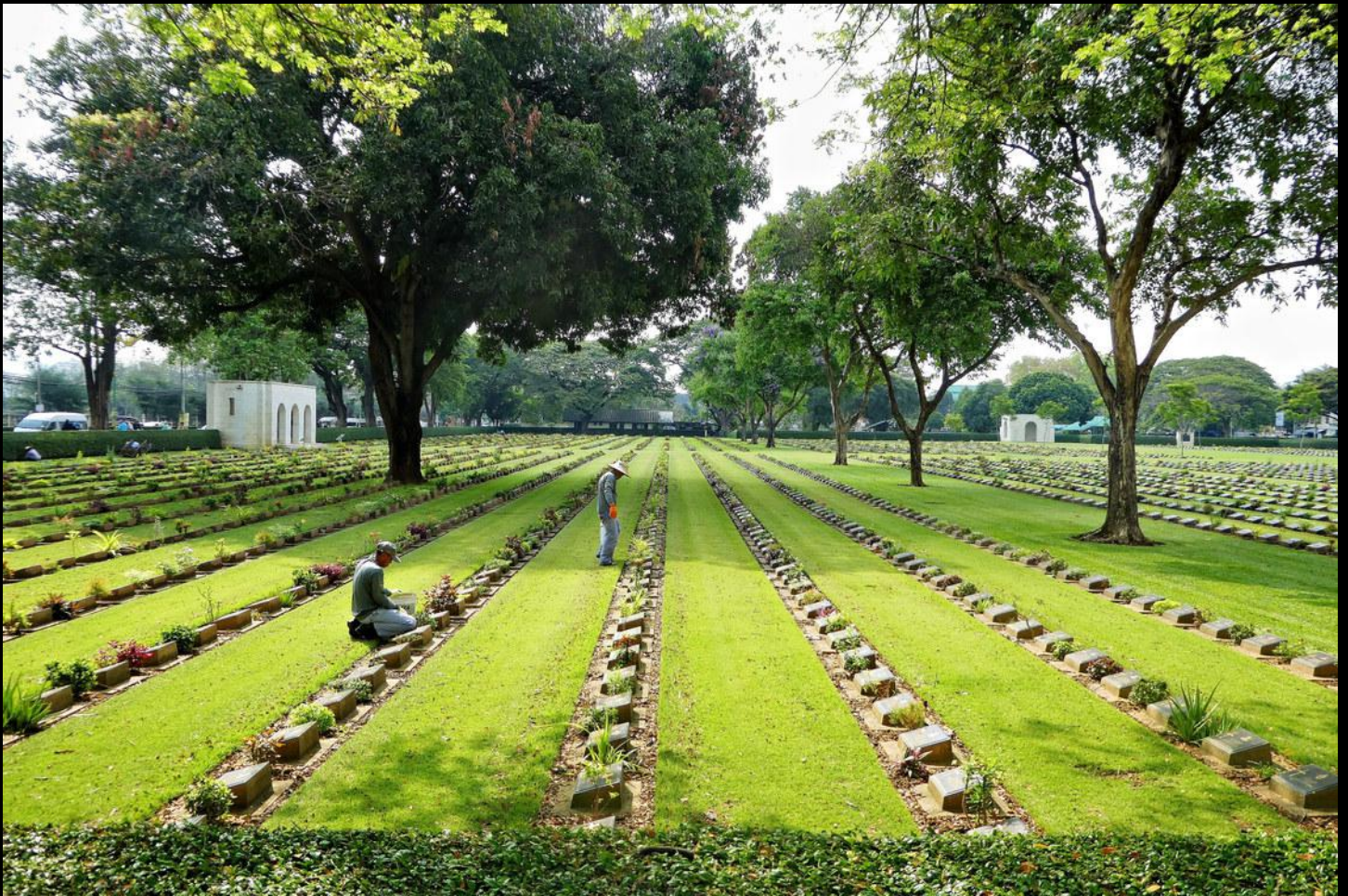


















## **Ruins, Rice Fields, and the Delux Hotel - Kanchanaburi to Suphan Buri**

Another cyclist arrived at Rainbow Lodge, and we chatted before setting off. The day was easy and fascinating—rice paddies, sugarcane fields, temples, and ancient ruins. We stopped at Wat Phra That Sala Khao, built between 1424 and 1488, and later at Wat Kuti Song.

In Suphan Buri, we found a room at the ironically named Delux Hotel. The single faint light forced us to use torches to find our belongings, and the towel rail fell off the wall during my shower. The “Delux” part clearly referred to a bygone era.









## **Monkeys, Mothers, and the Heat of Lop Buri - Suphan Buri to Lop Buri**

Some days are simply more bizarre than others. Every temple claimed something special—ancient ruins, the most beautiful Buddha in Thailand, a 300-year-old sacred tree, even sculptures of Buddha riding a giant bee. Roadside stalls sold fruit with chilli-sugar dips and, unexpectedly, grilled squirrels.

We reached Lop Buri early, but the heat—37°C, feeling like 40°C—kept us indoors until evening. Lop Buri's ruins were closed by the time we ventured out, so we visited the monkey temple instead. Monkey society mirrors our own in uncanny ways—family bonds, rivalries, tenderness, chaos.

The next morning, we rose early to explore before the heat set in. I witnessed a monkey giving birth—messy, raw, extraordinary. The mother clutched her newborn and placenta fiercely, baring her teeth at any monkey that approached. Infanticide is common among males, and she knew it. Eventually, she turned her back to the world and faced the temple wall, shielding her baby. It was a privilege to witness.















## **The Fallen Capital and the Memory of Kings - Lop Buri to Ayutthaya**

Ayutthaya arrived shortly after departing—encircled by rivers, steeped in history. Once the capital of Siam, founded in 1350, it grew into Asia's trading hub and by 1700 was the largest city in the world. All of it ended abruptly in 1767 when the Burmese invaded and razed it.

I never tire of Ayutthaya. Its ruins feel like the heartbeat of Thai history.

We stayed at Baan Lotus, an old schoolhouse turned guesthouse. The owner remembered me—something that always astonishes me. After a shower, we hopped on our bikes to explore the ruins, nearly all built during the Thai heyday.









### **Riding the Canal into the City - Ayutthaya to Bangkok**

The ride into Bangkok followed a quiet canal path, then a route along the new Skytrain line, still under construction. We slipped into the city like seasoned pros, arriving in the Khaosan Road area while the rest of Bangkok was still napping.

This marked the end of Janice's cycling tour of Southeast Asia. Thankfully, we still had nearly a week to enjoy Bangkok together.

















## **Bangkok, Dim Sum, and the Last Days of the Journey**

We wandered through the chaos of Bangkok—along canals, through markets, into odd corners of the city. In the evenings, we met Andre and Anton, friends from the UAE, and ate at my favourite dim sum restaurant in Chinatown. The next night, we joined them again at their fancy resort hotel, and they generously picked up the tab both times.

The days slipped by quickly. Soon it was time for Janice to pack her bicycle and panniers and prepare for her flight back to South Africa. The city buzzed around us, but our little bubble of shared adventure felt calm and complete.









## ***Epilogue***

*Journeys don't end at the city limits. They end slowly, in the quiet moments after —when the bicycle is boxed, the panniers emptied, the sunburn fades, and the legs still twitch at night as if pedalling through dreams.*

*The road leaves its mark in unexpected places: In the soft callus on the palm, in the memory of a monkey clutching her newborn, in the taste of sugarcane juice on a hot afternoon, in the echo of a train squeezing through a market, in the laughter shared over cheap meals and the kindness of strangers who appear at the exact moment you need them.*

*Bangkok was the end of the map, but not the end of the journey. The real journey continues.*















## About this Book

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

## **Welcome to Kuala Lumpur: A Vibrant Capital City**

Kuala Lumpur, the heartbeat of Malaysia, is not just a capital city; it's a dynamic metropolis bursting with life and energy! From its stunning skyscrapers to its bustling street markets, this city offers all the modern amenities you'd expect and more. Whether you're exploring the iconic Petronas Towers or savouring local delicacies, Kuala Lumpur is a feast for the senses.

## **Currency: The Malaysian Ringgit (RM)**

When navigating the vibrant markets or settling in at a charming café, you'll be using the Malaysian Ringgit (MYR). With an exchange rate of about 0.25 USD (1 MYR = \$0.25), your money goes a long way in this colourful country!

## **Language: A Melodious Blend**

While the official language is Bahasa Melayu, or Bahasa Malaysia, you'll find that English, Mandarin, and Tamil are also part of the everyday conversation. It's a beautiful tapestry of languages that reflects the nation's diverse culture!

## **Religion: A Colourful Mosaic**

In Malaysia, Islam takes centre stage as the predominant religion, embraced by the majority of the population. However, the country's rich cultural landscape also includes a significant number of Buddhists, Taoists, Hindus, and Christians. This religious diversity is a core part of what makes Malaysia so unique!

## **Location and Size: A Diverse Terrain**

Nestled at the southern tip of the Asian continent, Malaysia is a land of contrasts. Comprising both the Malaysian Peninsula and Malaysian Borneo, this country is also home to 878 stunning islands. From the pristine beaches of Langkawi to the historic charm of Penang and Malacca, each island offers a distinct experience waiting to be discovered!

## **Population: A Melting Pot of Cultures**

With a population exceeding 30 million, Malaysia is a vibrant tapestry of cultures and traditions! The country ranks 114th among the most populous nations, with a density of 97.25 people per square kilometre. However, step away from the bustling urban life, and you'll find peaceful landscapes that feel surprisingly spacious. The cultural blend of Malays (around 50%), Chinese (approximately 23%), and Indians (about 7%) creates a colourful mosaic that enriches Malaysian life, from food to festivals!

## **Internet Coverage: Stay Connected**

Stay connected during your journey! Internet services are widely accessible, especially in towns, ensuring you can share your amazing experiences with friends back home or plan your next adventure.

Get ready to explore Malaysia—where modernity meets tradition, and every corner tells a story!







## **About Thailand**

### **Capital City**

Bangkok, the capital, is often referred to as 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 eighty percent of the country's population of approximately 63 million people.

### **Religion**

While there is no official state religion (except for the law stating that the King must 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.



























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





