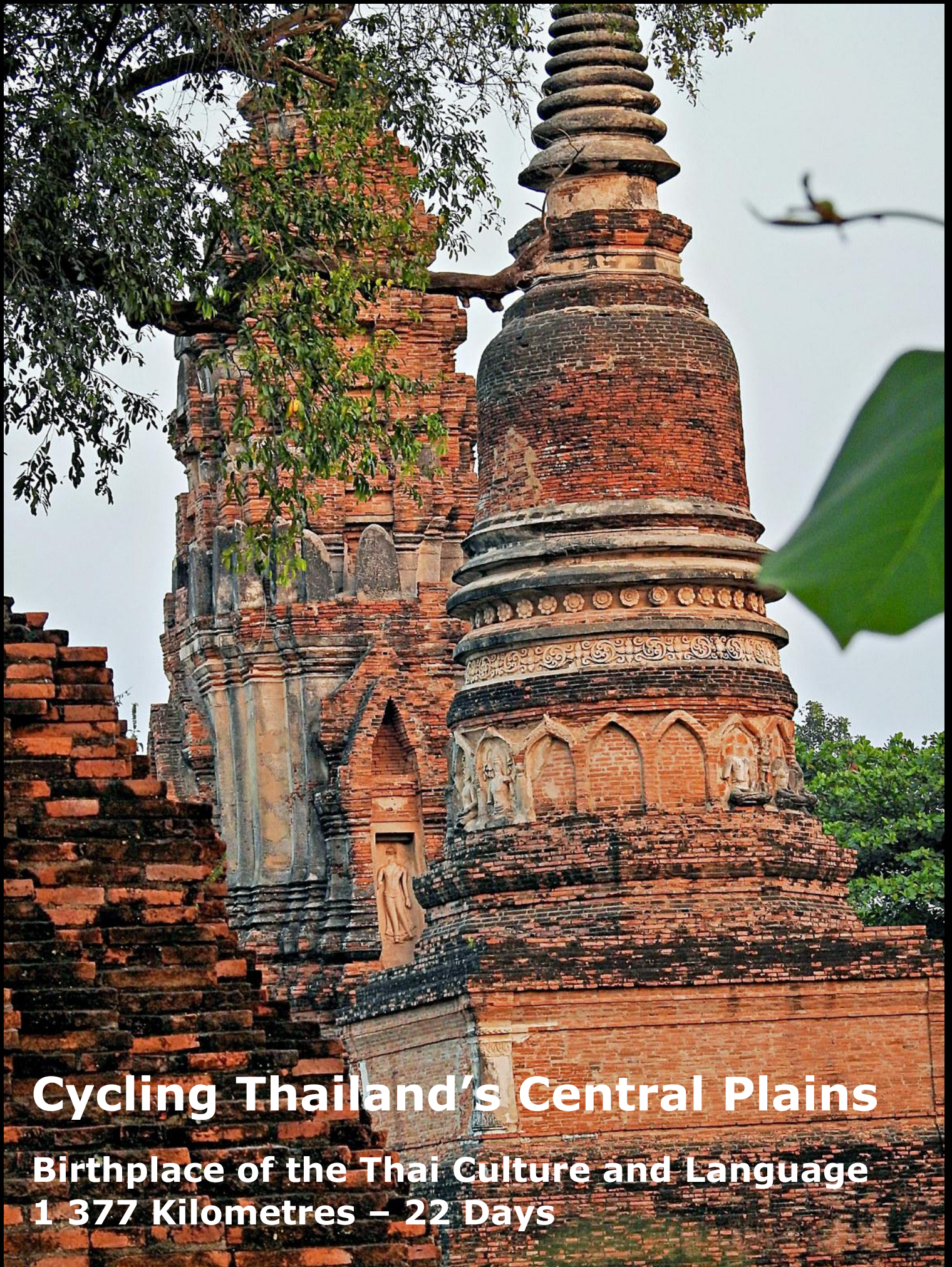


# Cycling Thailand's Central Plains



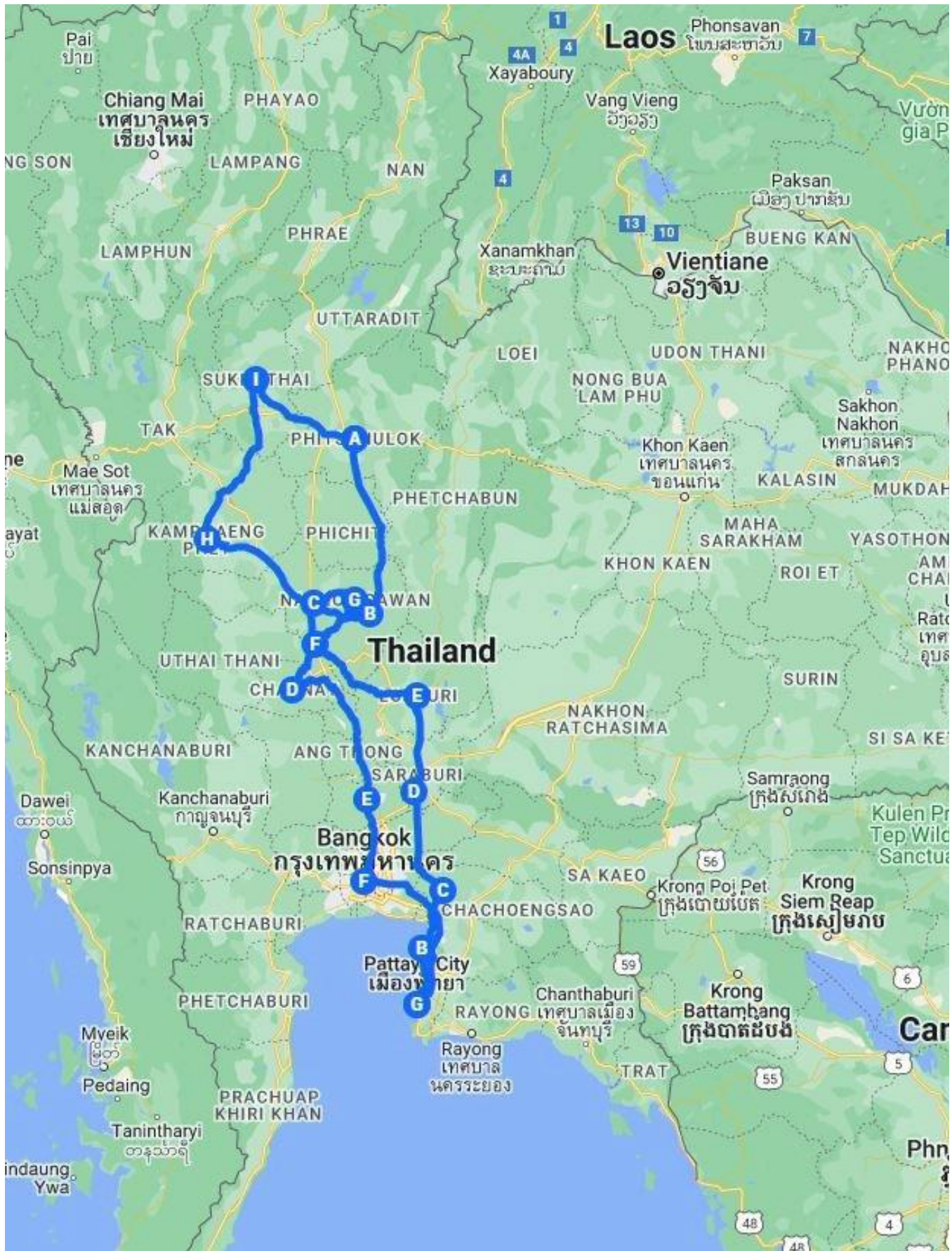
**When travelling by bicycle, even the most mundane trip becomes an adventure.**

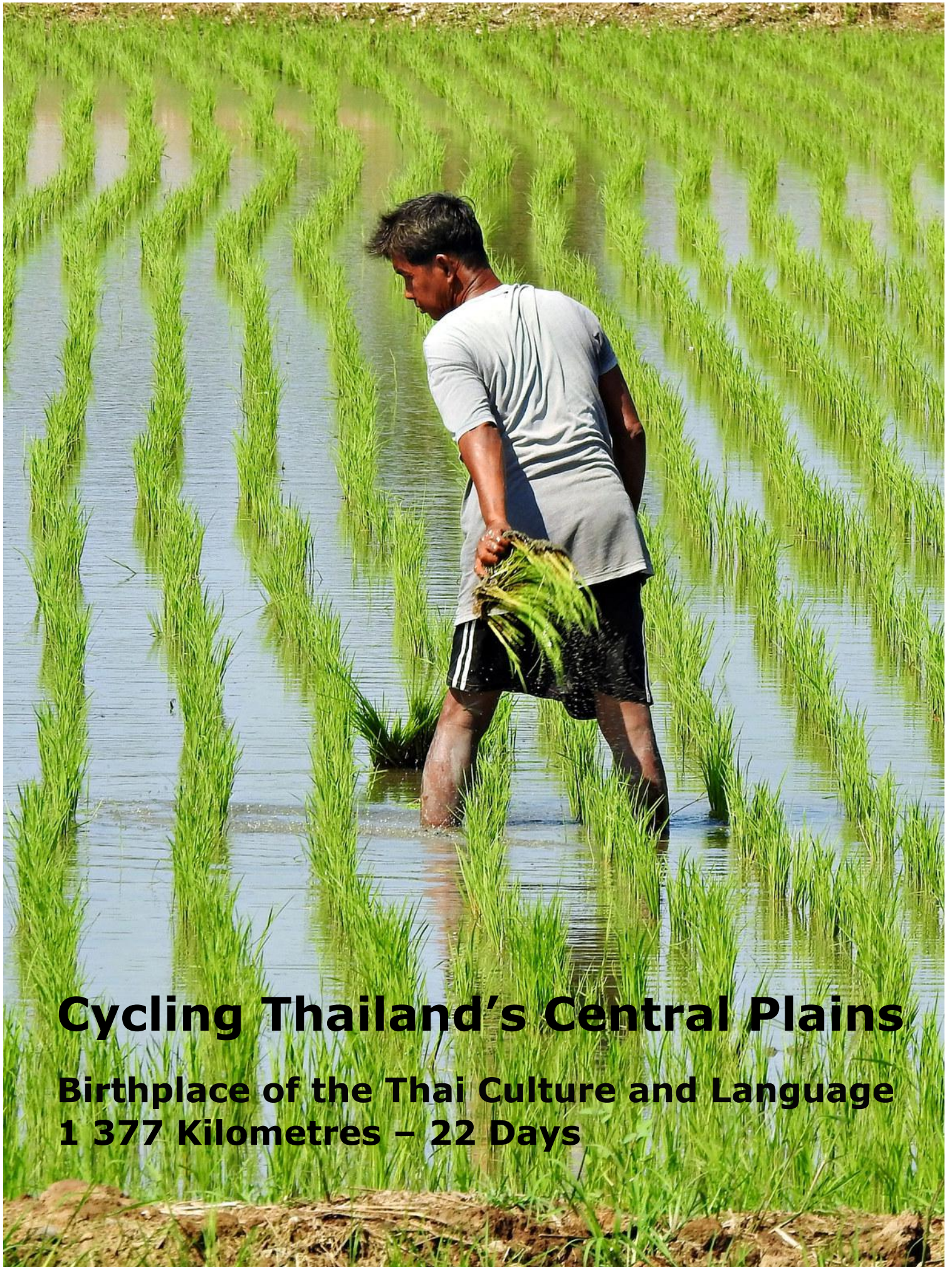




# Cycling Thailand's Central Plains

Birthplace of the Thai Culture and Language  
1 377 Kilometres – 22 Days





# **Cycling Thailand's Central Plains**

**Birthplace of the Thai Culture and Language  
1 377 Kilometres – 22 Days**

## **Thank You**

***I'm immensely grateful for the kind generosity of strangers and the random acts of kindness I experienced during our cycle tour of Central Thailand. It was 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, there would be no record of my journey.***

***I am much indebted to Val Abrahamse, my friend, for taking care of my personal and financial matters back home while I travelled the world. Her conscientious efforts made it possible for me to achieve my dream.***

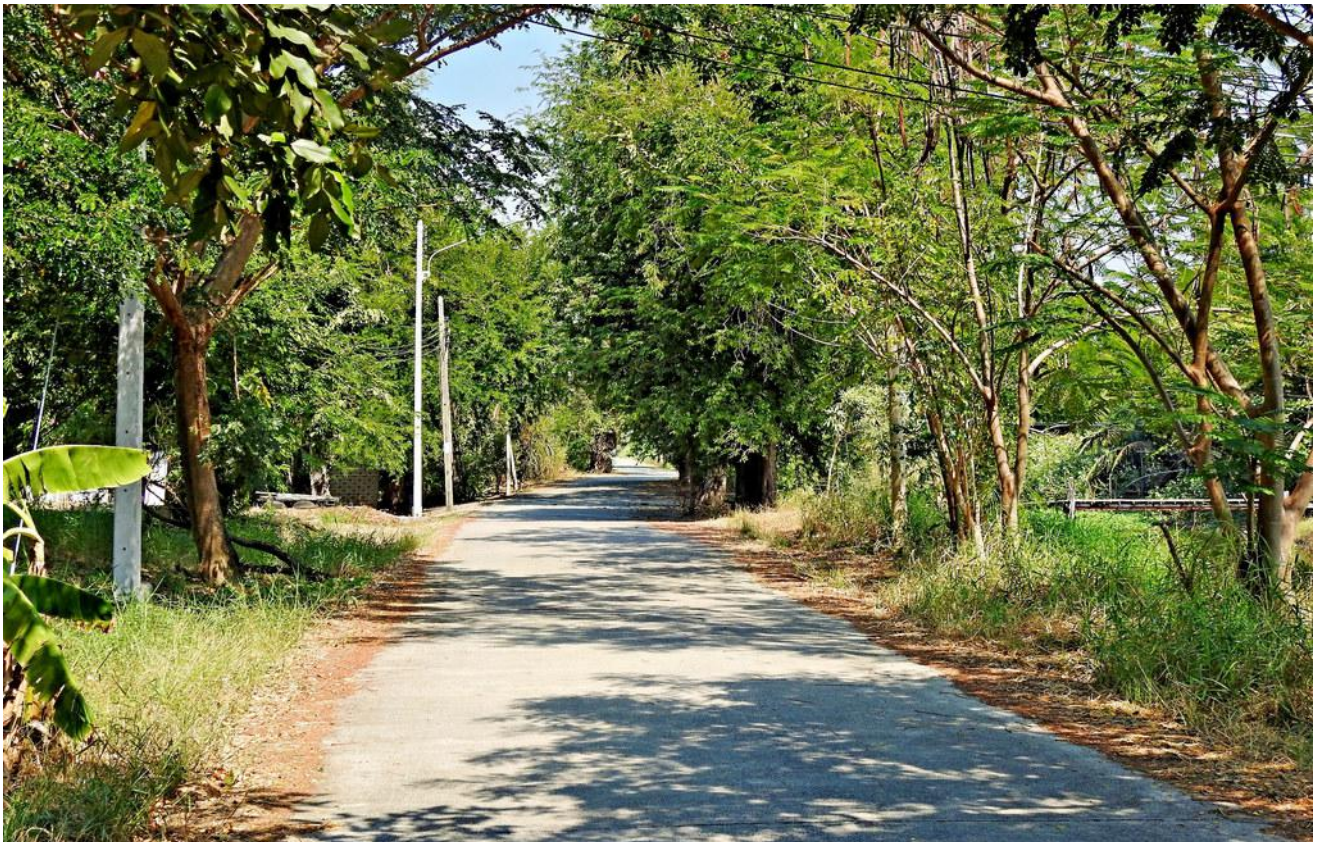


# Thailand

## 1377 kilometres – 22 Days

### **Jomtien – Bang Saen Beach – 83 km**

It was after midday before I got underway. Trying to stay on rural roads and avoid the traffic between Pattaya and Bangkok was quite challenging, but I slowly made my way to Bang Saen Beach, Chon Buri. It's easy to find a \$10 room there, and I was happy as the proverbial pig to be on the road, if only for a few weeks. By sunset, I strolled the less than 200 metres to the beach and felt privileged to sit there, toes wrinkling in the sand, watching the sunset.





## **Bang Saen Beach – Chachoengsao – 65 km**

The first 30 kilometres of the ride ran along a scenic part of the Gulf of Thailand partly via a road built over the ocean. The Northern Gulf of Thailand is shallow, with abundant birdlife and fishing opportunities. Afterwards, I veered inland along the Bang Pakong River but couldn't find country lanes, which is a rarity in Thailand.

Interestingly, authorities have persuaded fishermen on the Bang Pakong River to stop shrimping to protect the Irrawaddy dolphins, and 30 to 40 fishing boats have been modified to offer dolphin sightseeing tours. I was hoping to find a path along the river, but it never happened, and I never saw the dolphins.

Heavy traffic made cycling unpleasant, so I called it a day in Chachoengsao as I found an inexpensive room and needed to have a closer look at the map.

My early arrival allowed me to explore the area, including the 100-year-old Banmai Market. Nowadays, the market is only a weekend market, but traders live inside this ancient riverside complex. The light was beautiful. Back in my room, it was time to do the dreaded laundry.







### **Chachoengsao – Amphoe Nong Khae, Saraburi – 110 km**

From Chachoengsao, it was a much better day of cycling as I had plenty of rural roads to choose from. It was an absolute pleasure to pedal past rice paddies and tiny hamlets.

At one point, I picked up a red cloth which I thought of using as a flag, but it was too large and I tied it to the rear rack hoping it would make me more visible. For most of the day, my chosen path ran alongside a canal until, after 110 kilometres, it spat me out at a busy intersection where I decided to end my ride. I was surprised to find a fancy room for only \$14! Hahaha, or as fancy as a \$14 room can be.





### **Nong Khae – Lopburi – 80 km**

I took far too many pictures during the ride to Lopburi. It was a brilliant ride, partly along the railway line and partly next to a canal. Lopburi is an ancient town filled with old ruins that are all within easy walking distance. Nowadays, the old city is home to ordinary Thai life and a group of monkeys, who even have a temple of their own.

I'm glad that I arrived early as it was pretty warm (35°C). The \$10 room that I rented wasn't very fancy, but it had a fan, which was good enough for me. I felt like all I did was eat since I arrived, but there are so many good food options in Lopburi.

There's much to see in Lopburi and I decided to stay one more day. The windows of my room couldn't open, as the monkeys were notorious for breaking into rooms through the windows despite having bars on them. They can be quite a menace. The rest of the day was spent exploring the ruins of Lopburi.











### **Lopburi – Khok Mai Den – 110 km**

Not much happened en route to Khok Mai Den. I again followed a canal, or maybe it was a river, meaning there were many luminous green rice paddies and people fishing. I must have been way off the beaten track as I encountered very few villages. I loved the ride and felt energetic and happy to be out there. What a privilege.

Of course, there's always the ever-present Buddhist temple with its bright yellow Dharma flags blowing in the wind. These temples make peaceful and convenient stopping places, offering plenty of shade. Eventually, after 110 kilometres, I veered towards the highway to find food and accommodation.

At my accommodation I realised you'll hardly ever find a bed in Asia facing the door as it's the worst possible position, according to feng shui principles. People who practice feng shui call it the 'dead man's position' or the 'coffin position' because it resembles how we carry the dead through the door.

I was well into the Thai lifestyle and ordered a takeaway from 7-Eleven. Delivery is free, and even with a good tip, I still considered it a bargain as I didn't feel like getting on the bike to cycle the two kilometres to the shop in darkness.



### **Khok Mai den – Nakhon Savan (Anodard Hotel) 53 km**

I dawdled and didn't leave my comfortable bungalow until past nine in the morning.

My first destination for the day was the Khok Mai Den Ancient City ruins, located just two kilometres away. The city was founded between 457 and 957 AD during the Thawarawadi period. I parked my bike at the temple and walked to the top of the hill to explore the ruins. Upon my return, I found a bag hanging from my bike's handlebars containing rice and soup. The monk who left it gave me a Buddhist talisman as well. I expressed my gratitude and proceeded to a roadside shrine to eat the food, but I couldn't stomach the soup, which was a watery broth with bird-like chunks.

From the ruins, I followed the Chao Phraya River upstream to its origin at the confluence of the Ping and Nan rivers in Nakhon Sawan. From here, the river flows 372 kilometres south to the Gulf of Thailand, and the surroundings are mostly farmland with small villages. The fried banana snack is a popular treat in these hamlets, and petrol is sold in Coca-Cola bottles from hole-in-the-wall shops. Although most rice farming is still done manually, I saw farmers using drones to spread either seeds or fertiliser, but I couldn't determine which one.







### **Nakhon Savan - Tha Makhuea – 92 km**

Biking out of Nakhon Savan was amidst heavy traffic and workers installing decorations for the upcoming Chinese New Year festivities. A path next to the Ping River took me north through small riverside villages. I passed by sleeping cats and dogs and chickens pecking in the dirt. Women were selling goods on their bicycles, and I could hear monks chanting at colourful temples. The ride was easy, and the kilometres flew by quickly.

At my many water stops, people would shyly ask, "Where are you from?" and I would respond, "Africa Thai" (one of the few Thai words I know). They would usually exclaim, "Oh, you speak Thai!" The next question was generally about my destination, but as I was not sure where I was headed, I replied with the name of the next big town, to which they would always ask, "By bicycle?" LOL. Eventually, they would ask, "Only one?" My answer usually ended the conversation as a woman travelling alone by bicycle isn't something rural Thai people seem to understand.







### **Tha Makhuea – Kamphaeng Phet – 56 km**

The way to Kamphaeng Phet was along a busy road with large trucks carrying sugarcane to the mill, and the road surface was littered with sugarcane stalks.

My visit to Kamphaeng Phet was to explore its UNESCO World Heritage Site, which features ruins of structures dating to the 14th century, roughly the same time as the better-known kingdom of Sukhothai, a bit further north. Three J Guesthouse offers cute wooden bungalows at 350 THB. The guesthouse has a friendly owner and heaps of information, and is set in a jumble of arty nooks and crannies. Due to the short distance, I arrived early, but it was already 4 pm before I put my laundry in the machine and went to the famous Heritage Park. Unfortunately, it was too late to explore, but I snapped a few pictures before they closed the gates.

The following morning, I explored Kamphaeng Phet by bicycle, a vast area of ancient ruins, trees, and shade - what a delightful experience!











## **Kamphaeng Phet – Sukhothai – 85 km**

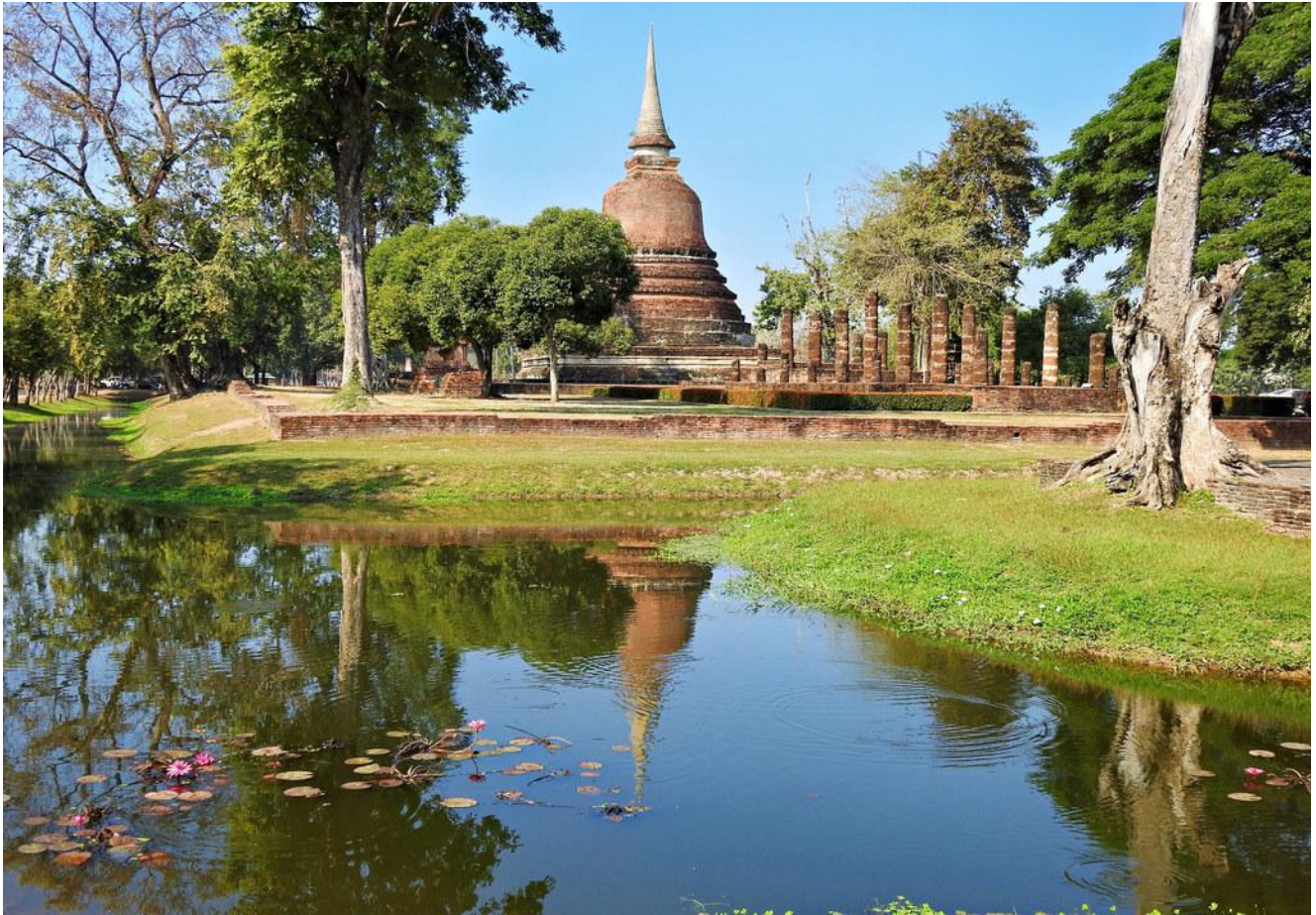
From Kamphaeng Phet, I again opted for a rural path that ran past rice, banana, corn and sugarcane plantations. The weather was perfect, and I biked along, hardly stopping as the going was super easy.

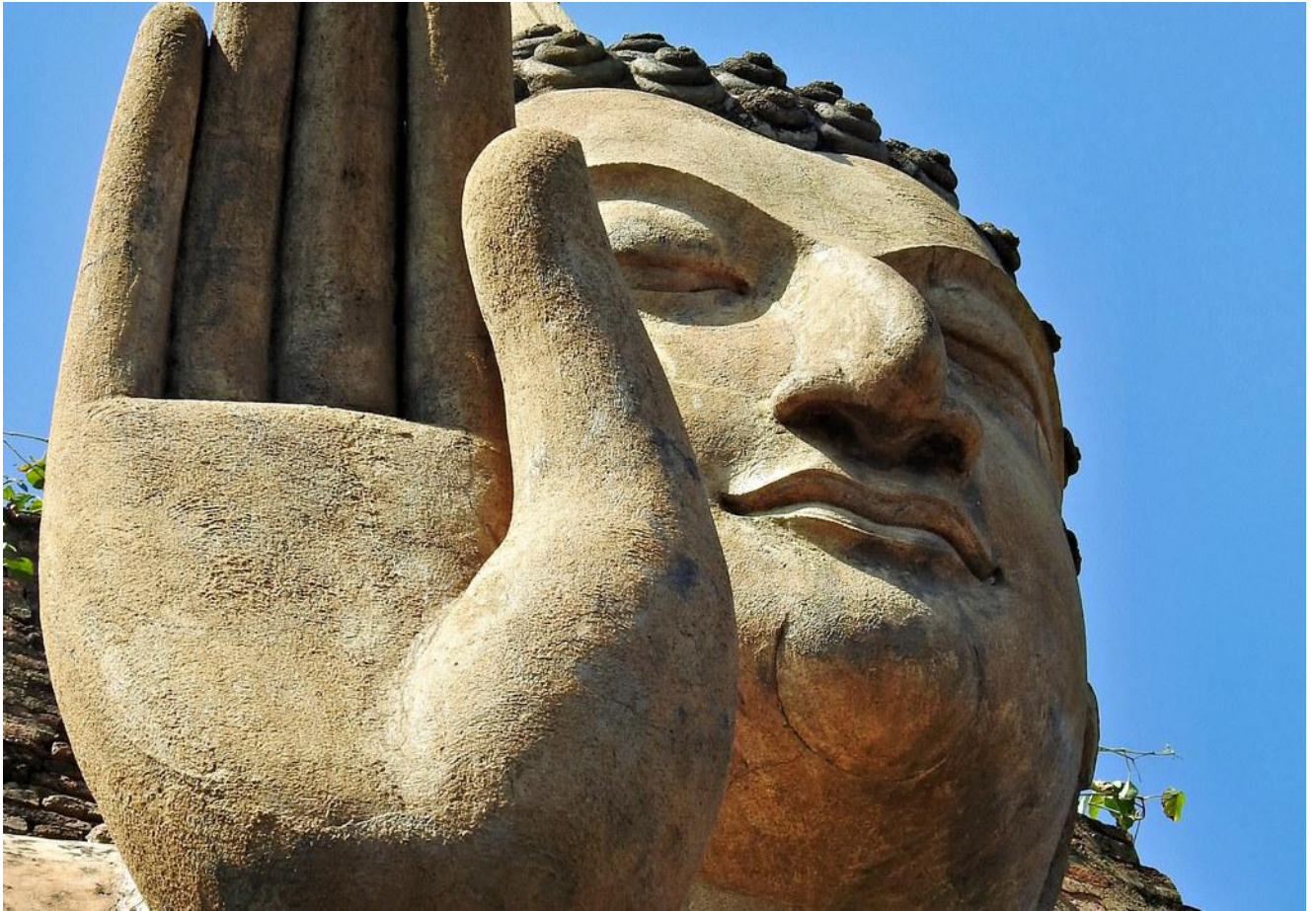
Thailand's central region is a fertile plain that provides easy cycling. It's also the birthplace of the culture and language that defines Thailand today. Sukhothai is, therefore, immensely touristy, and a budget room came at 400 THB. Once booked in, I realised my wallet was nowhere to be found! I have two wallets, one containing my day money, which is in my handlebar bag and the other holding my bank cards and remaining cash. At my destination, there was no sign of my main wallet! I freaked right there and then! It doesn't matter how much money you have, without access to it you have nothing!

I contacted my sister, Amanda: Please send money! But even that would take at least 24 hours. Adding that I couldn't access my Thai bank app, made my stress levels go through the roof! Many hours later, I had money in my wallet, and I hoped the money transfers would show the next day. Phew! What a day! Thanks to [Vitoonguesthouse2Fanroom](#), who allowed me to book in without paying - it is much appreciated!

An additional day was spent in Sukhothai as I waited for the money transferred to show in my bank account and to investigate the area. Sukhothai was the capital of the first Kingdom of Siam in the 13th and 14th centuries, and the area has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.











The old walled city is home to some of the most well-preserved and impressive ruins I've seen in Thailand. A delightful day was spent cycling the outlying area. The park is open until 8 pm, and as I was staying across the road, I walked to the nearby temples. The park was much nicer to explore at sunset than in the midday heat.

### **Sukhothai – Phitsanulok 78 km**

From Sukhothai, a 78-kilometre ride took me to Phitsanulok. The route was relatively uneventful, but I was fortunate to find a bike lane along the main road. With the wind at my back, I made good progress and arrived in Phitsanulok early.

I was surprised by the town, mainly because it reminded me of India. The old town, with its famous Buddha and charming historical structures, also gave me an Indian vibe.

My accommodation was quite intriguing, as it was bounded by the highway, the railway line, and a mosque! Although immensely central, I thought it best to walk to the nearest 7-Eleven to buy a two-pack, as I didn't think I would get much sleep. LOL.

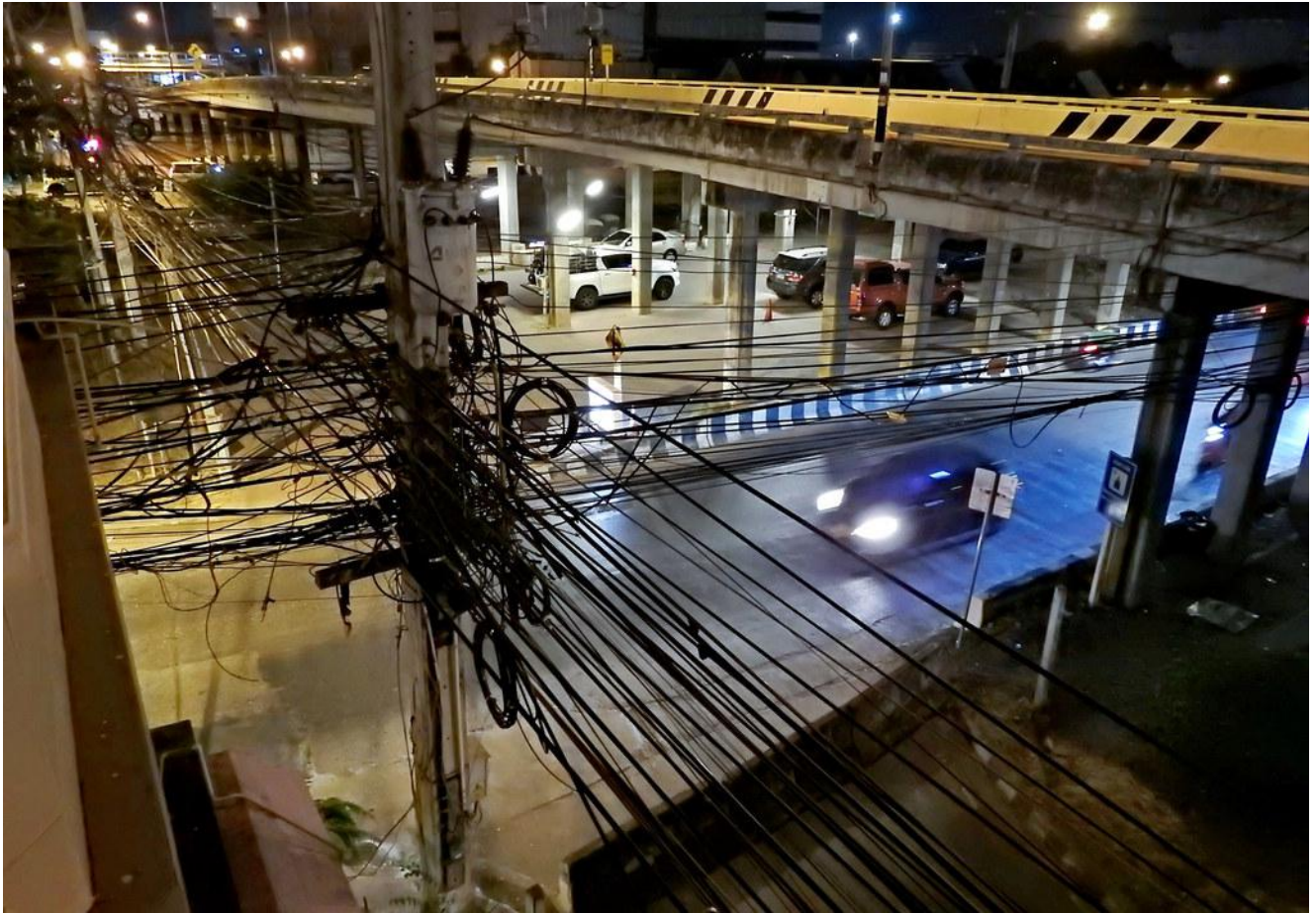


### **Phitsanulok – Taphan Hin – 100 km**

I was pleasantly surprised by the comfort of my hotel despite the muezzin's call. I didn't hear the muezzin but woke to the hustle and bustle of the street below (it must have been that two-pack - LOL).

After a breakfast of coffee, fried dough, bananas, and biscuits (included in the room rate), I nervously attempted to cross the busy Main Road and I must have made such a spectacle that cars stopped allowing me to pass. I continued south along the Nan River, passing temples and people living on barges. The weather was pleasant, and most rice paddies were still green, as they were near the river and not dependent on rain.

After 100 kilometres, and spotting the New Hua Hin Hotel (which wasn't new, not even by any stretch of the imagination), I decided to call it a day. The small village was bustling as food vendors set up their stalls. After a quick shower, I barely had to walk 100 metres to find a delicious noodle dish. It was such a novelty that I opted for a takeaway.







### **Taphan Hin – Tha Tako – 98 km**

The morning market was already in full swing on departing the (not-so-new) New Hua Hin Hotel. I continued south along the river, passing the, by now, familiar small villages and bright green rice paddies.

Around noon, I decided to change my route and head east instead of going through Bangkok. However, I soon realised I needed to withdraw more cash, but Miss Smarty Pants' decision to cancel her Bangkok Bank card meant I couldn't make a cardless withdrawal. The word "fuck" left my mouth with alarming frequency! Fortunately, I had just about enough money for a room and food. Still, I desperately needed to stop at the nearest Bangkok Bank, 55 kilometres to the south, first thing in the morning. The drama was never-ending!



## **Tha Tako- Nakhon Sawan – 48 km**

By morning, I blitzed the 50 kilometres to Nakhon Sawan, where I came to a screeching halt in front of Bangkok Bank. Not much later, I walked out with money and a new bank card in my wallet. Phew!

I was so relieved that I booked into a nearby hotel and walked to the mall. My wandering took me through the city park, a massive area with bike and walking lanes, as well as basketball and volleyball courts. I love new destinations where everything is unfamiliar, and I can't understand the language. The city was buzzing with preparations for the Year of the Dragon celebrations, and red lanterns and dragons were everywhere.





## **Nakhon Sawan - Chai Nat – 92 km**

If I followed the main road, the day's distance would have been 62 kilometres, and if I followed the route suggested by Organic Maps, it would have been 72 kilometres. Still, I wouldn't have it any other way.

I again followed the river, and a winding river it was. The little settlements I encountered were old-worldly, and wooden shophouses lined the path. I loved it. The Chao Phraya River is one of the main rivers in Thailand and, like any other important waterway, it comes with an ancient history. It's a place where the temples are old and the boats long!

There was no need to stop in Chai Nat, but it looked like a sizable town with inexpensive accommodation.





## **Chat Nai - Ang Thong – 100 km**

The next morning, I followed the route indicated by Organic Maps for about five kilometres before veering off onto a smaller path. What a delight to make my way through these tiny hamlets where cats, dogs and water monitors lay sleeping on the road. One can easily assume they are dead. I tried to make a noise to warn them I'm coming, but their eyelids or ears only flickered.

I dragged my heels a tad, and it must have been near 4 pm when I arrived in Ang Thong. Shortly before the town, I stopped at Wat Sukkasem Thammikaram, a 130-year-old temple home to a 38.9-metre-high statue of Phra Siwali Mahalap. The statue can be seen from many kilometres away. According to ancient belief, Phra Siwali Mahalap brings good fortune and lottery results. Hence, villagers flock here to pay homage and ask for blessings by offering honey, fresh fruit, and white or fragrant flowers. The honey may have something to do with the swarm of bees that annually nest under the arm of the statue, and hundreds of people visit the temple during that time.

Finding inexpensive accommodation was easy, and I soon spotted the popular budget Ang Thong hotel. I couldn't wait to get in the shower - as I have often said: a shower is never overrated. Afterwards, I washed my cycling clothes in the wastepaper bin, and I'm sure they never had such a clean bin. Then, I could finally walk to the 7-Eleven for my evening beer and portion of vegetarian fried rice.



## **Ang Thong – Ayutthaya - 65 km**

I had no intention of going to Ayutthaya but ended up there anyway. Again, the way was mainly along a canal dotted by typical Thai-style timber homes on stilts and, of course, numerous temples, one more ornate than the other.

In Ayutthaya, I cycled to the train station thinking of taking a train into Bangkok, but there was a two-hour wait for the train and, instead, I sought out my old favourite Baan Lotus Guesthouse, a converted old schoolhouse. I felt tired and only walked to the shop for food and relaxed for the rest of the afternoon.









### **Ayutthaya – Bangkok – 85 km**

Although I wasn't feeling up to it, I decided to cycle the 85 kilometres to Bangkok. Luckily, it was Sunday and the traffic light. However, cycling into a city with a population of 11 million can be pretty nerve-racking. I was relieved to finally arrive at my destination, but I chose to take the train from Bangkok to Pattaya as I had cycled that route too many times before and wasn't in the mood for the traffic.

I slept so well that I woke up too late to catch the train, but it wasn't a big deal since I enjoy spending time in Bangkok.

### **Bangkok – Pattaya 15 km (by train)**

The previous evening, I made sure the alarm was set and I cycled the five kilometres to the train station in the dark. I was nervous because I wasn't sure if drivers could see me.

Getting the bicycle onto the train was challenging since the door was relatively narrow, and it required careful manoeuvring to get the bike into the coach. Three hours later, it took the same effort to get off at Pattaya station.

Once I arrived at my room, the washing machine worked overtime, and I cleaned the bike bags so they would be ready for use after mid-March. I'm wondering which route I should take next, as there are many exciting destinations.







## **About this Blog**

This blog documents my cycle ride from Pattaya to Sukhothai and back. There are numerous roads, and the route described in this blog is not necessarily the best.

### **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. The readings on my odometer sometimes varied from markers and maps and occasionally over or under-read. At the end of each day, 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 Central Thailand in January 2024.

### **Insurance**

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

### **Clothing**

During a cycling holiday, we spend most of our time riding bicycles, so having high-quality, padded cycling shorts is essential. You can wear any comfortable footwear while cycling, but I suggest hiking sandals or lightweight hiking shoes for more casual riders. Thailand is hot year-round, and even though January is considered "cool", I doubt that you will ever need warm clothing unless visiting areas of higher elevation. 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 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. 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.



**About Thailand** (Please refer to the Internet or your favourite travel guide for a more in-depth overview)

### **Capital City**

The capital, Bangkok, nicknamed the Big Mango, is a modern, sprawling, high-tech city that offers everything a capital city is expected to offer and more.

### **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 Thailand religion, meaning all Thai people enjoy religious freedom. However, Buddhism is the most common Thailand religion, 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.







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**There's an immense sense of freedom in carrying with you  
all you need.**



