

Thailand Trip Report
January 8-22, 2023



Trip participants from left to right: Nat (Spice Roads guide), John Pringle, Mardi Leslie, Scott Carlisle, Carolyn Carlisle, Deb Kinnear, Vivian Holford, Pat Rourke, Elaine Merritt, Robin Howe (leader), Dan Carey (co-leader), Pim (guide). Not shown: Paddy Kirk and Bob Scoverski.

The trip was, in short, a marvelous adventure. Our very companionable twelve member group was made up of half e-bikers and half road bikers. In total, we rode 850 kilometers with 3,650 meters of elevation gain. We started biking in Petchaburi, just outside Bangkok, and ended in Phuket two weeks later. This was a mostly flat route along the Bay of Bangkok, into lush rural areas, and through small villages. We encountered more rolling hills as we biked south and a few notably large hill climbs in and around Phuket. Temperatures were often in the mid 30s C in the afternoons, resulting in hotel pools and beaches being popular destinations after rides. The scenery was spectacular, especially in the Cheow Lan Lake area, where we enjoyed a day and a half of rest, and when we had views of coastal islands. Sadly, we couldn't help but notice that

heavy plastic use for consumer packaging is an environmental problem in Thailand: plastic litter was a common site along many roads and embedded in the sand at some beaches.



Bangkok warm-up ride









Pontoon lodging at Cheow Lan Lake









Hike to Pakarang Cave during rest day on Cheow Lan Lake



Snorkeling trip on Koh Talu Island



As expected, we visited many beautiful Buddhist Temples.





A particular surprise for many of us was the many small farms and micro businesses that our ride leader spontaneously stopped to show us. These included coastal salt farming, coconut processing, coconut harvesting (assisted by monkeys), rubber tree farming, anchovy drying, and palm paper drying (for cigarettes). Pictures below provide a peek at these various operations.



Bob was briefly “employed” by the salt farmer



Anchovy drying operation with workers from Myanmar



Palm leaf drying



Coconut harvesting





Rubber tree sap collection by Myanmar worker

Another wonderful surprise was a visit we made to a school near Larn Thong Beach. With the approval of the teachers, we visited three classrooms of 1st to 3rd grade students. The children overcame their initial shyness and charmed us all. We dug deep into our memory banks to sing a few songs, such as "Old McDonald," with the children. Then one girl shared a poem and one girl sang a solo song for us. When we eventually donned our helmets and started pedaling away, the adorable children leaned out the classroom windows, waved, and yelled "Goodbye."



Thai food was of course a focal point and a highlight for most of us. While Thai food can be quite spicy, our guides made sure that local restaurants kept heat to a minimum for us. Overall, the food was delicious and we ate heartily...and frequently. Most of the dishes served were easily recognizable, such as chicken and pork curries, brothy soups, and seafood dishes. A couple of the more unusual dishes, at least to us, are shown in pictures below.



Fried whole fish with crispy basil



Pork omelet



Honey comb with dead bees (tasted earthy)



Sea cicada appetizer (very crunchy)

The four member staff of Spice Roads Tour Company were most helpful and efficient. Our lead guide, Nat, is a veteran leader who quickly and capably adjusted our route and itinerary, as needed. Our second guide, Ms Pim, kept us entertained and patiently attempted to teach us a few Thai phrases. The logistics team made up of Mr. Chin and Mr. Pre was impressive. One van was always behind riders and one van was ahead. At each major turn and intersection, one of these gentlemen were there to direct us, or, if necessary, to stop traffic so that we could safely cross the road or highway. Almost magically, Mr. Chin appeared at every rest stop with a table of deliciously ripe fruit and local treats.





Mr. Chin and Mr. Pre, front right side

Individual riders provided the following thoughts on what they felt was a highlight or notable feature of this trip:

Robin - saw the real Thailand!

Dan - experienced good compatibility of e-bikers and regular bikers as well as comradery within group

Carolyn - benefited from Nat's impressive ability to find and show us small farms and businesses. And the food!

Scott - loved the rides, especially through small villages

Elaine - impressed with flexibility of Spice Roads guides and staff. Also notable was the efficiency of packing and unpacking of bikes and gear.

Pat - enjoyed many interesting stops and short tours

Debbie - surprised at how good the roads were

Vivian - impressed with amazing organization of Spice Roads staff. Yes, temperatures were hot, but heat wasn't overwhelming.

John - viewed gorgeous scenery at Cheow Lan Lake. Simple temples were delightful.

Paddy - enjoyed interesting stops to talk with locals and short tours

Bob - liked morning rides through small villages and observing local activity

Mardi - loved Mr. Chin's fruit! Ditto on fascinating short tours.



Phuket finally!



