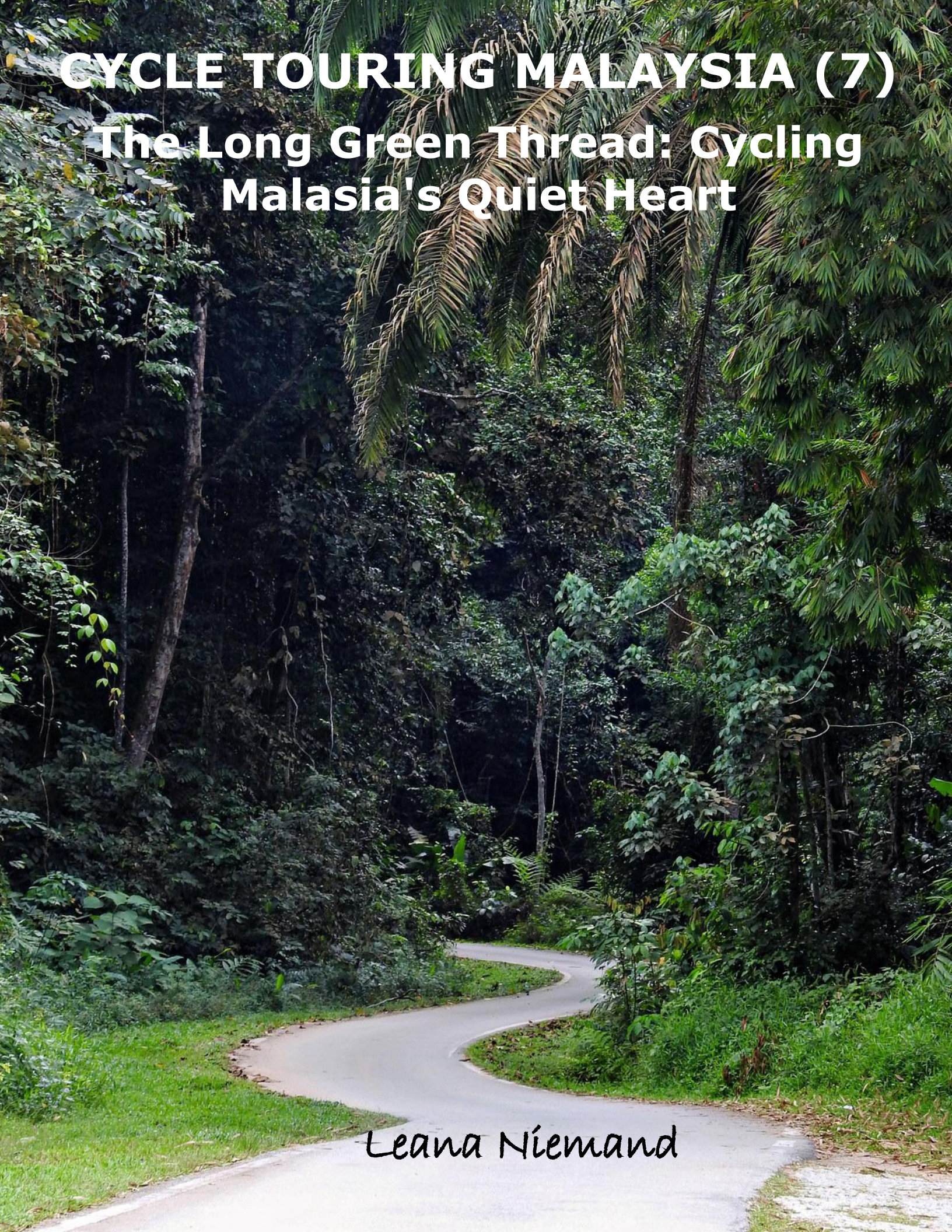




CYCLE TOURING MALAYSIA (7)

The Long Green Thread: Cycling Malasia's Quiet Heart

Leana Niemand

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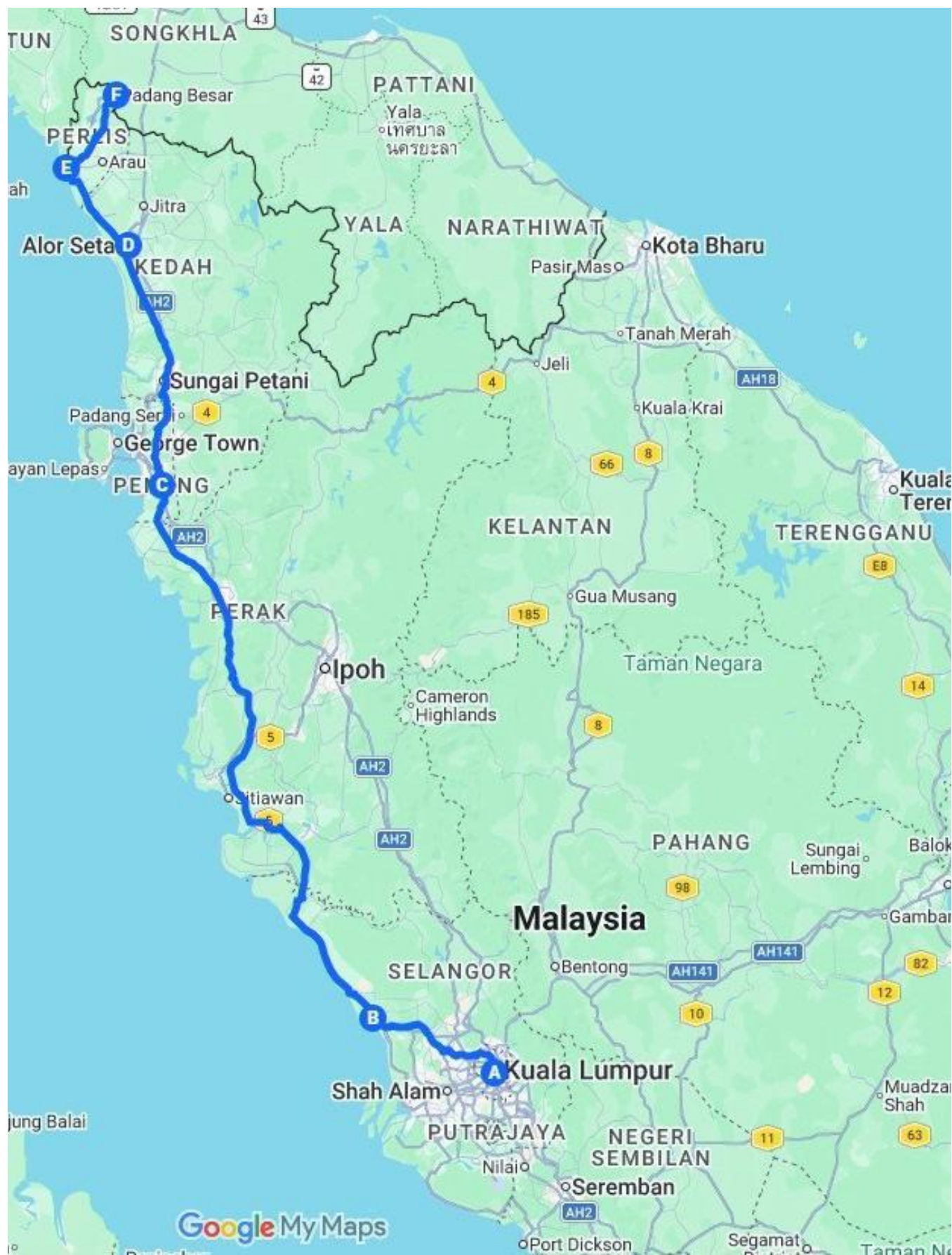
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CYCLE TOURING MALAYSIA (7)

**The Long Green Thread: Cycling
Malasia's Quiet Heart**





Thank You

I am immensely grateful for the kindness of strangers and the random acts of generosity I encountered during my ride in Malaysia. It was indeed a humbling experience.

My sister Amanda played a significant role in documenting my travels by keeping my journal entries and photos well-organised. Without her efforts, there would be no record of my journey.

Lastly, a big shoutout to Peter Young for the accommodation, food and help in Kuala Lumpur.



THE LONG GREEN THREAD: CYCLING MALAYSIA'S QUIET HEART

Prelude

The first morning of the year hit like a spark: bright sky, open road, the quiet thrill of crossing into Malaysia with nothing but intention and wheels. I thought I was heading for Langkawi. Instead, a customs surprise flipped the compass, and the detour became the beginning of a long green thread—rice fields, coastlines, ferries, friendships, and the kind of small magic that only appears when plans fall apart.



THE COAST CALLS

In the border town of Padang Besar, the first morning of the year arrived bright and clear. It was the kind of morning that makes you believe anything is possible. I woke with a single, stubborn intention: *Langkawi*. I hadn't set foot on the island in years, and the idea of returning tugged at me with the force of nostalgia and curiosity combined. So, I packed up, tightened the straps on my panniers, and rolled out into a new country and a new year.

The road to Kuala Perlis unfurled like a glossy travel brochure—blue sky, shimmering paddies, and a breeze that felt like a blessing. The distance was short, only forty-odd kilometres, but every one of them felt like a gift. I hummed along to my music, the rhythm syncing with the steady turning of my wheels.

Then I reached the ferry terminal.

The queue of vehicles waiting to board stretched into the horizon like a scene from a dystopian film. Cars, vans, trucks—an endless metallic serpent inching toward the sea. Still, I parked my bike and marched to the ticket office, only to be met with a surprise: *customs clearance required for bicycles*. I blinked at the official, half expecting him to laugh and say he was joking. But no. Langkawi, it seemed, had rules.

I weighed the hassle against the joy of the ride I was already having. The decision was easy. I turned my handlebars south and let the coast guide me toward Alor Setar instead.



The road hugged the shoreline, the ocean glittering to my right while rice paddies stretched out in luminous green to my left. Swiftlet houses punctuated the fields like odd, windowless monoliths. The light was soft and golden, the kind that makes even the ordinary look cinematic. I felt suspended between sea and land, between the year I'd left behind and the one just beginning.

I reached Alor Setar after 100 kilometres, sun-soaked, salt-crusted, and utterly content. I checked into the Comfort Motel, a place that has probably looked exactly the same since the 1970s. Fifty ringgit bought me a ground-floor room, air-conditioning, a shower, and the warm welcome of the elderly owners—who, if I'm honest, are probably younger than I am. I wheeled my wagon straight into the room and felt instantly at home.

Malaysia's official language is Bahasa Malaysia, but with its multicultural tapestry, you hear everything from Tamil to Hokkien to English. My own Bahasa is mostly learned from road signs—functional, slightly comical, and just enough to get me into trouble.

As night settled over Alor Setar, I felt the familiar thrill of being back on the road: the freedom, the uncertainty, the small joys that accumulate like beads on a string. Day one of the new year had not gone according to plan, but it had delivered something better—a reminder that detours often hold the real magic.







PENANG AND HISTORIC GEORGE TOWN

Morning in Alor Setar arrived warm and bright, the kind of tropical light that seems to rise fully formed rather than gradually waking. Before leaving town, I couldn't resist one last look at the Zahir Mosque. Its Moorish domes floated above the city like something lifted from a dream—white, elegant, impossibly serene. I snapped a photo, knowing full well that no picture ever captures the way a place makes you feel.

Then I pedalled out of town and immediately found myself on a quiet canal path threading through rice fields. The sun, only 5.5 degrees north of the equator, wasted no time asserting itself. Within minutes, I was drenched in sweat, but it didn't matter. The world around me was lush and alive—villages tucked among palms, women in burkas selling homemade snacks, the smell of frying dough drifting across the road. I felt like the luckiest person alive, gliding through a landscape that seemed to open itself just for me.

Malaysia's countryside has a way of sneaking up on you. One moment you're cycling past a simple wooden house, the next you're staring at distant hills draped in green, the sky a perfect, impossible blue. I hummed along to my music, the rhythm of the road settling into my bones.

At Tanjong Dawai, I boarded a small ferry to cross the wide Merbok River. The fee was steep for such a short hop, but it saved me a long detour on a busy road. Besides, there's something magical about crossing water with your bicycle—like being granted passage into a slightly different version of the world.



The day stretched on in a series of small, beautiful moments: stopping to take photos, pausing to admire the light on the paddies, watching clouds gather and drift apart. By the time I reached Butterworth, the sun was low and the new ferry terminal felt like a maze designed by someone who had never actually taken a ferry. Eventually, ticket in hand, I rolled my bike aboard and let the boat carry me across to Penang.





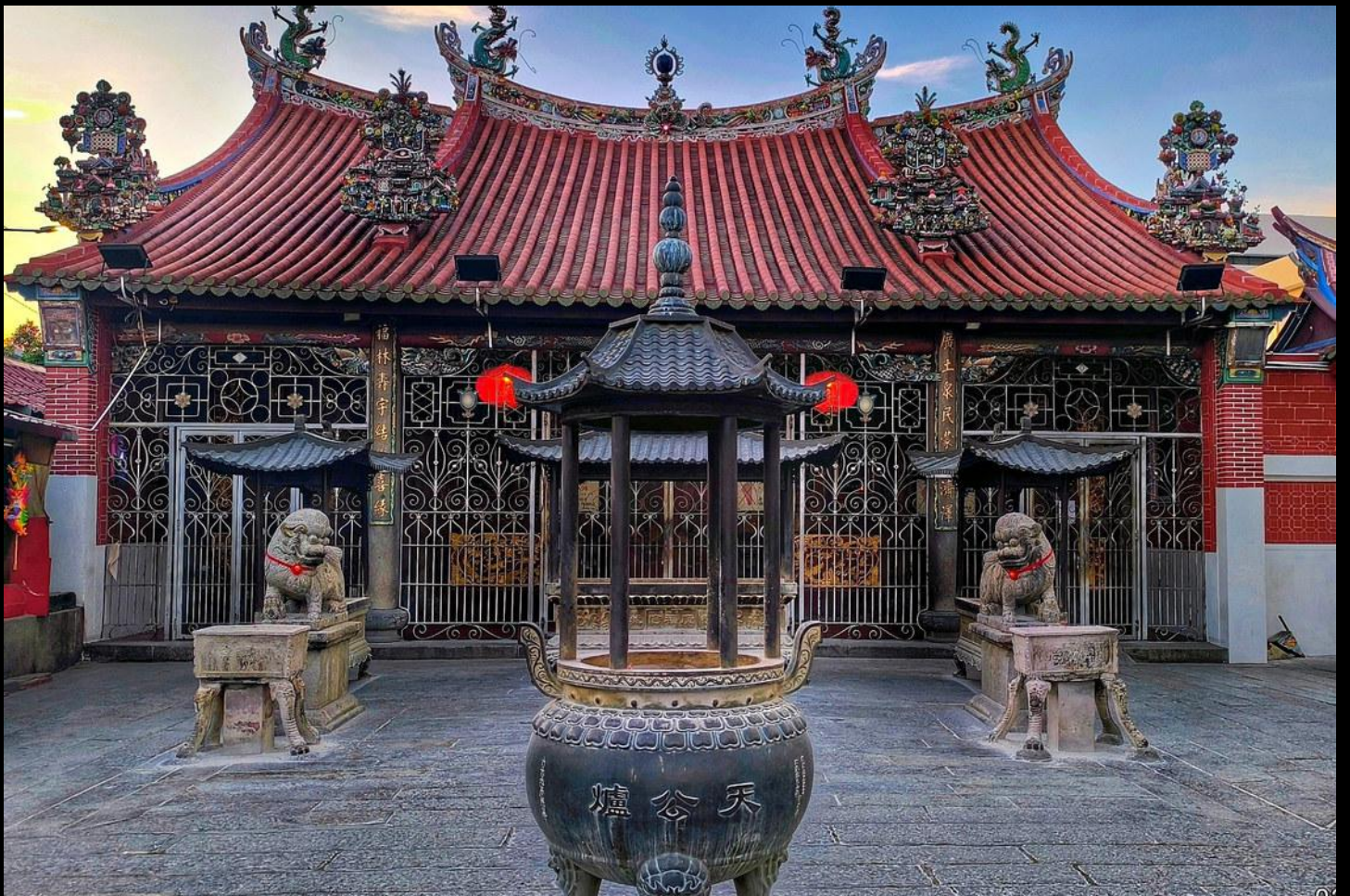
George Town felt like a homecoming. I headed straight to Hotel Noble, a place that has seen decades of travellers and still offers the cheapest beds in town. I barely dropped my panniers before hunger drove me back out the door toward the famous food stalls. After a full day of cycling on nothing but snacks, the first bite felt like salvation.

From the ferry, Penang had looked modern—high-rises, glass, steel. But a short walk to the ATM revealed the truth: George Town is a living museum, a UNESCO World Heritage Site layered with centuries of trade, migration, and monsoon-driven waiting. Ships once lingered here for months, trapped by the winds, and in that waiting they created a cultural stew that still simmers today.

The heat was blistering, so I didn't explore much. Instead, I wandered down to the Clan Jetties—wooden villages built over the water, each belonging to a single Chinese clan. The planks creaked under my feet, and the houses stood on stilts like quiet sentinels of another era.

Later, I met Connie Chew, a friend I'd known online for nearly a decade but had never met in person. Social media is strange that way—it connects people who might never cross paths otherwise. Connie, a fermentation specialist with a mind full of bubbling cultures and microbial magic, arrived with her son Mark, who kindly drove us around Penang in search of its famous delicacies.

Iced coffee mixed with tea—something I never imagined could taste good—turned out to be divine. Coconut roti melted on my tongue. We talked, laughed, shared stories of travel and life. It felt like meeting old friends rather than new ones.



By the time I returned to my room, full and content, I felt deeply grateful—for the road, for the people it brings into my life, for the way travel keeps expanding the edges of my world.





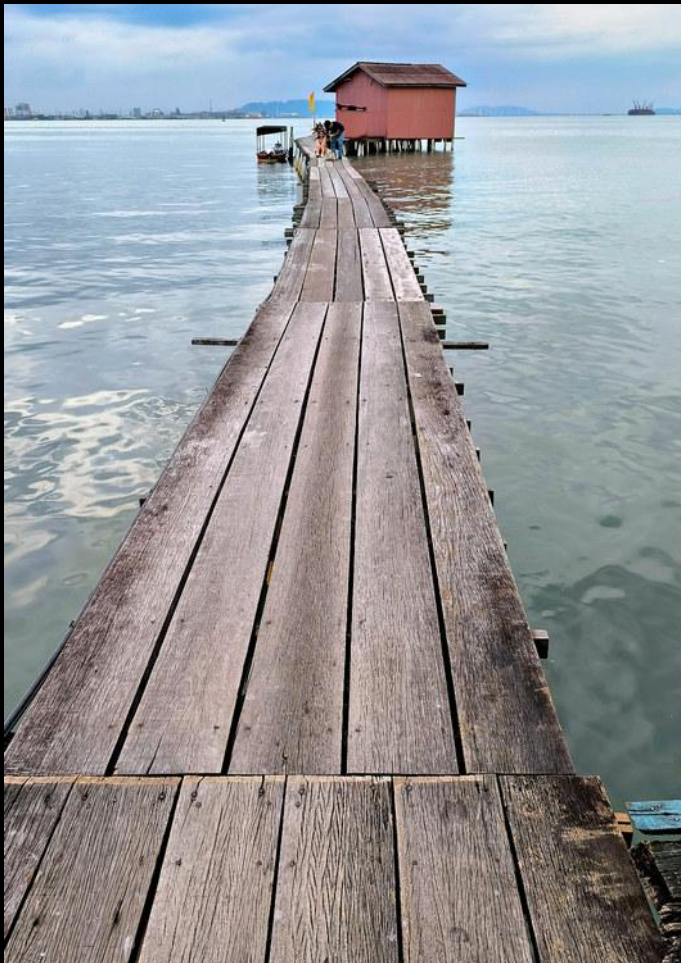


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ROADS OF RICE AND RAIN

I left Penang late, rolling onto the ferry at ten o'clock with the kind of reluctant farewell you give a place that has fed you well, sheltered you kindly, and reminded you that the world is full of unexpected friendships. The crossing to the mainland was short, but it felt like a small rite of passage — a gentle push back into the rhythm of the road.

What I expected to be a straightforward ride quickly became a day of improvisation. Malaysia's development is astonishing, but it also means that quiet backroads are disappearing, swallowed by highways and toll roads that cyclists are not welcome on. I zigzagged through neighbourhoods, industrial edges, and half-finished roads, trying to avoid the roar of traffic. Every time I thought I'd found a peaceful route, it dead-ended into a construction site or a toll plaza.

Eventually, I surrendered to the coastline, and the world softened again. A narrow road traced the edge of the sea, the air thick with salt and the smell of drying nets. Villages appeared like small exhalations — a cluster of houses, a shop selling cold drinks, a cat sleeping in the shade. The road was quiet, almost meditative, and I felt myself settle back into the steady rhythm of pedalling.

By mid-afternoon, the sky darkened with the kind of tropical warning that needs no translation. I checked my map and realised the nearest affordable accommodation was still far off. The only hotel within reach was expensive, and the thought of cycling forty more kilometres to Taiping made my legs protest. So I turned inland, back toward the main road, hoping for something more reasonable.



The hotel I found was indeed cheaper, but it came with a long list of rules — a full page of what not to do, printed in stern lettering. It was clearly a Muslim-only establishment, or at least one that preferred it that way. Still, it had a bed, a shower, and a roof that would keep the rain out. After a day of chasing quiet roads, that was enough.

I lay in bed listening to the call to prayer drift through the humid evening, mingling with the hum of traffic on the highway. It wasn't the most memorable stop, but travel isn't made only of highlights. Some days are simply stepping stones — necessary, unglamorous, and part of the long thread that ties a journey together.

Tomorrow, I told myself, would bring new roads, new landscapes, and perhaps a little magic again.





Malaysia's one-hour time difference had been playing tricks on my body since I crossed the border. I kept staying awake until one in the morning, convinced it was still early, and then waking to a world that remained stubbornly dark until well past seven-thirty. If it weren't for the muffled sounds of other guests stirring, I might have slept straight through the morning.

When I finally opened my eyes, rain drummed softly on the roof — not a storm, just a steady, unhurried drizzle. I lay there for a moment, listening to it, feeling that familiar tug between reluctance and resolve. Eventually, resolve won. I packed my panniers, wiped the moisture off my saddle, and rolled out into a world washed clean.

As the rain eased, the morning revealed itself in layers: mist rising from the rice fields, water pooled in the paddies like mirrors, egrets standing motionless as if carved from bone. The air smelled of wet earth and new beginnings. It was one of those mornings that makes you grateful for the simple act of moving through a landscape under your own power.

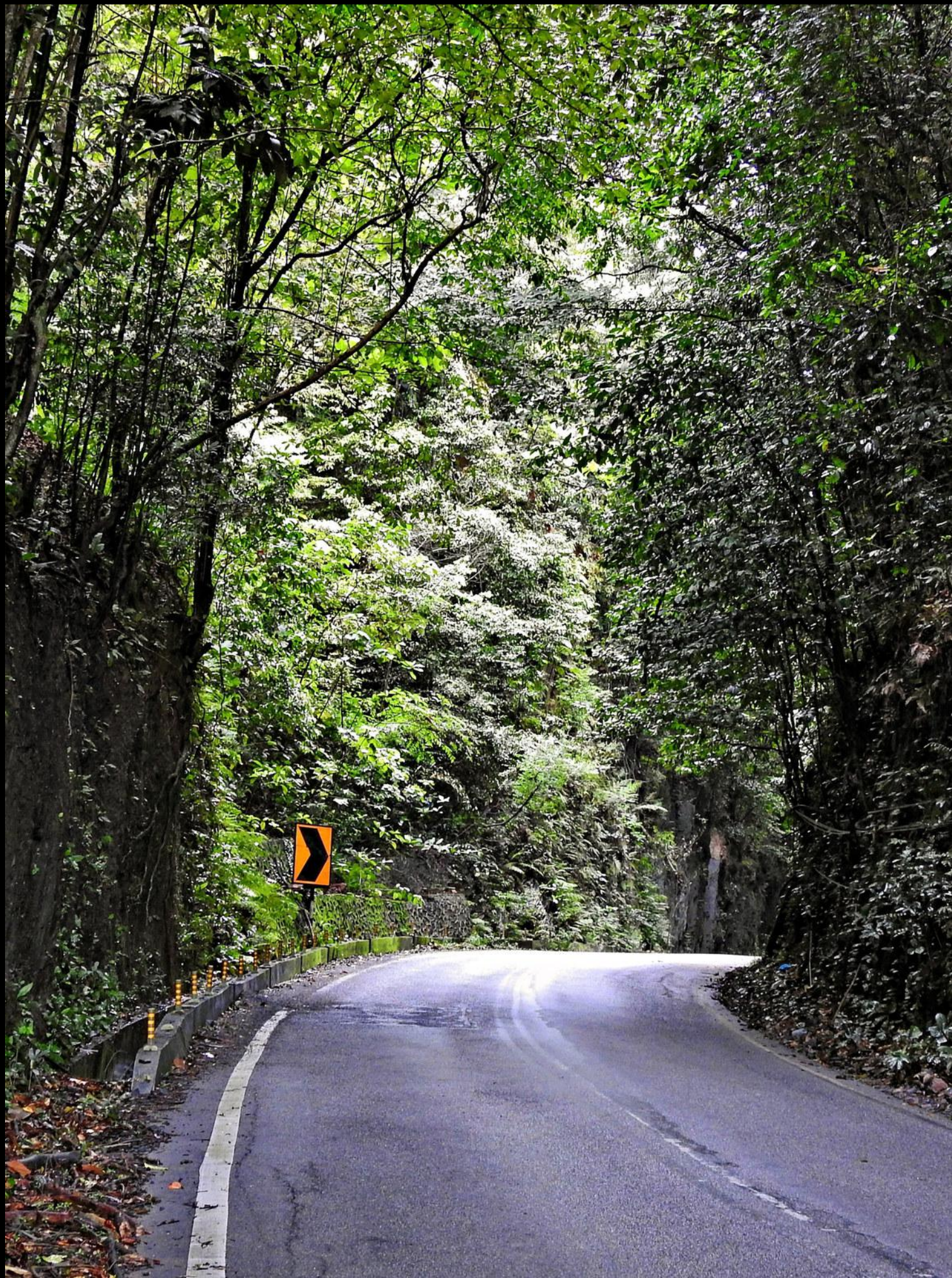
The ride to Taiping was short but beautiful. Away from the highways, Malaysia becomes a different country — quieter, softer, more intimate. Villages appeared like small pauses in the green, each with its own rhythm: a man sweeping his porch, a woman hanging laundry, children splashing barefoot in puddles. Life unfolding in its unhurried way.



By late morning, I rolled into Taiping, a town whose name means “everlasting peace.” It felt fitting. I had documents waiting that needed printing and signing, so I decided to stay the night. Unfortunately, my accommodation choice turned out to be a mistake. OYO, in its infinite mystery, had delivered a room that felt like it had given up on life sometime in the early 2000s. The mattress sagged, the walls were tired, and the air smelled faintly of damp resignation.

I told myself it was only for one night.

Still, the day had been good — a gentle ride, a fresh morning, a reminder that even short distances can hold their own quiet magic. As evening settled over Taiping, I felt the familiar mix of restlessness and contentment that comes with long-term travel. Tomorrow would bring new roads, new challenges, and perhaps a little more of that Malaysian green that had already begun to seep into my bones.



THROUGH THE PALM OIL KINGDOM

I woke before dawn, unsure whether it was the lumpy mattress, the lingering time-zone confusion, or simply my body deciding it had had enough of OYO hospitality. Outside, the world was still dark — winter in theory, though Malaysia never truly feels like winter. The sun wouldn't rise until nearly half past seven, so I lingered, letting the morning unfold slowly.

By the time I finally rolled out of Taiping, it was almost nine. The air was cool, the light soft, and the road ahead felt wide open. Not much happened in the early hours — just me, the bike, and a long ribbon of tarmac threading through the countryside. It was a proper road, a secondary one, but busy enough with trucks to keep me alert. Their engines growled past in waves, the wind of their passing tugging at my panniers.

The landscape shifted as I rode. Dense oil palm plantations rose around me, their fronds arching overhead like dark green cathedral ceilings. Beneath them, ferns and mosses thrived in the filtered light, creating a layered world of greens. It was beautiful in its own way — not wild, but lush, orderly, and humming with life.

I didn't stop much. There wasn't much to stop *for*. No temples tucked into hillsides, no unexpected villages, no scenic detours. Just the steady rhythm of pedalling, the hum of tyres on asphalt, and the occasional monkey darting across the road like a mischievous thought.



As I approached Lumut, the landscape shifted again. The Sungai Munjung appeared — a wide, calm inlet reaching in from the Strait of Malacca. The road crossed it on a long bridge, and suddenly the world was full of trucks again. Lumut Port and its industrial sprawl stretched along the water, a hive of warehouses, cranes, and cargo. It wasn't pretty, but it was alive with purpose.

Yet even here, nature insisted on having the last word. A vast mangrove forest spread out along the inlet, its roots rising like knotted sculptures from the mud. Mangroves are easy to overlook, but they are quiet heroes — protectors of coastlines, nurseries for fish, and some of the most efficient carbon-capturing ecosystems on the planet. I often forget how extraordinary they are until I'm standing beside them, watching the tide breathe in and out through their tangled roots.

By the time I reached Lumut proper, I was tired in that satisfying, full-body way that comes from a long day of steady riding. It hadn't been a dramatic day, but it had been honest — a day of movement, of landscapes shifting slowly, of the quiet interior of Malaysia revealing itself one kilometre at a time.

Tomorrow, I knew, would be longer. But for now, I let the day settle into my bones, grateful for the road, the mangroves, and the simple fact of arriving.



The morning in Lumut began on a narrow country road, the kind that feels like it was laid down just for cyclists and wandering souls. One lane, quiet, almost shy. The world was still waking up — a few birds calling from the trees, a distant motorbike, the soft rustle of palm fronds shifting in the early breeze. It felt like the kind of road that invites you to breathe deeper, pedal slower, and pay attention.

Once I reached the coast, I stopped at a small roadside stall to refill my water bottles. The vendor handed me a triangular packet of nasi lemak wrapped in brown paper — rice, peanuts, a boiled egg, sambal, and those tiny anchovies that Malaysians adore. I spent an absurd amount of time trying to scoop out the miniature fish, each no longer than a fingernail. It was a comical battle, but the food was delicious, eaten while watching fishermen on a boat coax a school of fish toward their net. Or at least, that's what I assumed they were doing. The choreography of it was beautiful — men, sea, and movement in quiet synchrony.



Malaysia's climate doesn't believe in seasons. It believes in rain — generous, unpredictable, and ever-present. The country receives anywhere from 1000 to 2500 millimetres of rainfall a year, and some regions even more. The sky can turn from blue to bruised in minutes, and today was no exception. Much of the day unfolded under shifting clouds, the air thick with the promise of rain.

I cycled through vast rice fields and endless oil palm plantations. Malaysia is the world's second-largest producer of palm oil, after Indonesia, and the scale of it is staggering. Row upon row of palms stretched into the distance, their trunks dark and straight, their crowns heavy with fruit. It's a landscape that is both beautiful and unsettling — lush, orderly, and undeniably altered by human hands.

Toward the end of the day, I crossed the Perak River — Sungai Perak — a wide, dignified sweep of water that seemed to carry centuries of stories. It is the second-longest river in Peninsular Malaysia, beginning near the Thai border and winding its way south. Crossing it felt like stepping into a new chapter of the country.

By the time I reached Sungai Besar, 120 kilometres later, I was tired in that deep, satisfying way that comes from a long day of honest effort. My legs ached, my clothes were damp with sweat and humidity, and my mind felt pleasantly quiet. There's a particular kind of peace that comes after 121 kilometres — a peace earned kilometre by kilometre, breath by breath.



As night settled over the town, I felt grateful for the road, for the fishermen, for the tiny anchovies I had battled at breakfast, and for the way Malaysia kept revealing itself — not in grand gestures, but in small, steady offerings.

My day in Sungai Besar began with the familiar comfort of roti canai — warm, flaky, impossibly soft, served with a small bowl of curry that tasted like sunshine and spice. I ate it at a roadside stall where the air smelled of frying dough and woodsmoke, and where the vendor greeted me with the kind of effortless kindness that seems woven into the fabric of rural Malaysia. It was the perfect start to a short, easy day.

I set off along quiet roads that threaded through rice fields ready for harvest. The paddies glowed gold in the morning light, their colours shifting with every passing cloud. Farmers moved slowly through the fields, bent silhouettes against the shimmering landscape. The air was warm but gentle, and the kilometres slipped by almost without effort.

Kuala Selangor arrived earlier than expected — a small, unhurried town perched at the edge of history. After checking into my room, I wandered up Bukit Melawati, the hill that once served as the stronghold of the Selangor Sultanate. The climb was short but steep, and at the top I found cannons, stone foundations, and a troop of monkeys who clearly believed the hill belonged to them.

The wind carried the scent of the sea, and the view stretched across the river and mangroves. It was hard to imagine the battles that once raged here — the Dutch invasion of 1784, the sultan's remarkable recapture of the fort, the shifting tides of power. Now the hill was quiet, the cannons sun-bleached, the monkeys lounging like bored sentries.



I lingered there for a while, letting the history settle around me. Travel has a way of collapsing time — one moment you're sweating up a hill, the next you're standing in the echo of centuries.

Back in town, the afternoon unfolded slowly. I wandered, I rested, I watched the world drift by. It was a gentle day, a necessary pause between longer rides. A day of roti canai, golden fields, and a hill full of stories.





TOWARD THE CAPITAL

Kuala Selangor to Puchong, Kuala Lumpur

I woke feeling anything but bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Something was off — a heaviness in my limbs, a fog behind my eyes — and finding a tick in my bed did nothing to improve my mood. I must have picked it up during my wander through the little nature park the day before. I flicked it away with a shudder and hoped I wouldn't end up with tick-bite fever. The road would tell.

Riding into a major city is rarely pleasant, and Kuala Lumpur was no exception. I tried to stay on minor roads, but they were narrow, busy, and full of trucks that seemed determined to pass as close as possible. The air grew thicker, the traffic louder, the landscape more industrial. It was one of those days when cycling feels less like freedom and more like survival.

But then — relief. The kind that arrives all at once.

I reached Puchong and rolled into the familiar orbit of my friend Peter, a WarmShowers host I've known for a decade. I expected a couch or a spare mattress. Instead, he handed me the keys to a lovely little flatlet — my own space, clean and quiet, with a fridge stocked with beer. I could have hugged him. After days of cheap hotels, lumpy beds, and the creeping suspicion that something was wrong with my health, the flatlet felt like a sanctuary.



The next day, I did almost nothing. I let myself sink into the comfort of the room, the cool air, the stillness. The bite — or what I thought was a bite — had grown into a large, red, blistering patch under my arm. It spread across my chest and back, angry and insistent. I didn't feel sick, exactly, but I was lethargic, drained. Something wasn't right.

Still, I stayed put, waiting for documents that needed to be verified at the embassy. The road could wait. My body, clearly, needed a pause.

There's a particular kind of gratitude that comes when you're vulnerable on the road — when you're far from home, not feeling your best, and someone offers you a place to rest without hesitation. Peter's flatlet became that place. A small island of comfort in the sprawling chaos of Kuala Lumpur.

Tomorrow, I told myself, I would figure out the rash, the documents, the next steps. But for now, I let the day be what it was: a pause, a breath, a moment of stillness in the long, unpredictable rhythm of travel.



ILLNESS, KINDNESS AND BUREAUCRACY

Rest Days in Puchong

The next morning unfolded slowly, the way mornings do when your body is tired and your spirit is grateful for stillness. I had planned to fly to India soon, and there were things to prepare — documents to sort, logistics to arrange — but for the moment, I let myself move gently through the day.

Peter, ever the generous host, handed me a bike box as casually as if he were passing me a cup of tea. His kindness seemed endless, woven into every gesture. Later, we walked to a nearby food court for breakfast, where I discovered kari laksa — fragrant, spicy, comforting. It became my instant favourite, the kind of dish that feels like a warm hand on your back.

In the afternoon, Gan arrived — Peter's friend, and another familiar face from the strange, sprawling world of social media. We'd followed each other's journeys for years, two cyclists orbiting the globe in our own ways. Meeting in person felt natural, as if we were simply continuing a conversation that had begun long ago. We shared beers, stories, and the easy camaraderie that only fellow travellers truly understand.



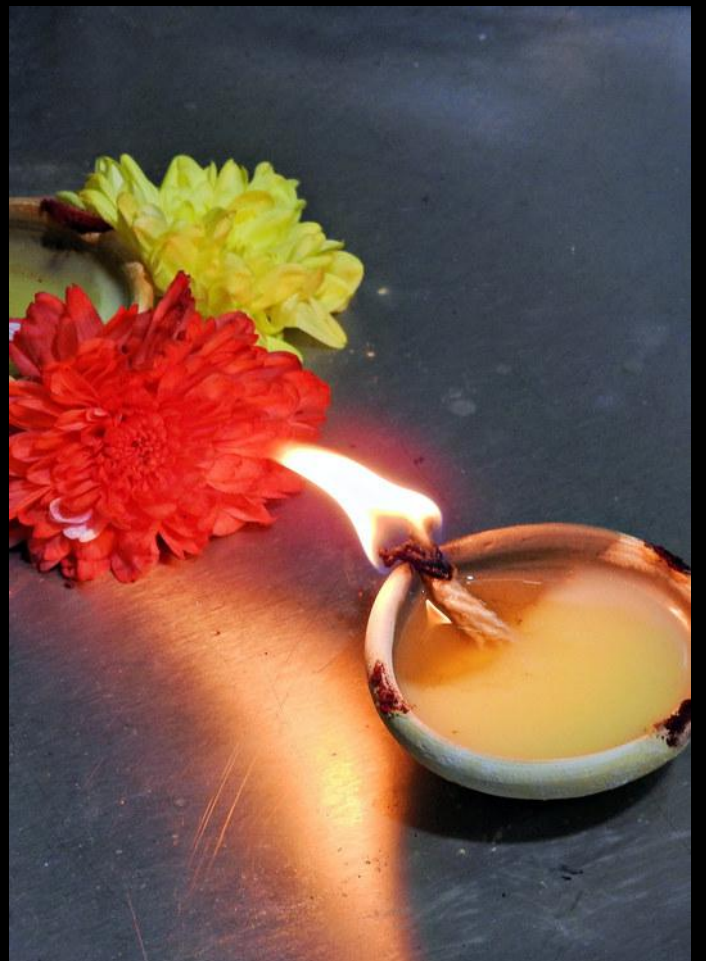
CHEVETTY
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The following morning, I allowed myself the luxury of sleeping in. Saras — a woman I'd met five years earlier in Kuala Selangor — was coming to visit. She arrived with her warm smile and gentle presence, and we went out for lunch together. I felt a flicker of embarrassment as I realised I hadn't paid for a single meal since arriving at Peter's. Hospitality in Malaysia is not a performance; it's a way of being. Still, I felt the tug of wanting to give something back.

Peter had plans to go camping at Sungai Sendat in Ulu Yam, so I spent the night at Saras's home to celebrate the start of Pongal, the harvest festival. In her kitchen, she prepared traditional sour and sweet rice, the aromas filling the house with warmth and memory. Then she dressed me in a salwar kameez, elegant and bright, and we made our way to the temple. The air was thick with incense, chanting, and the soft murmur of devotion. It felt like stepping into a different rhythm of life — slower, deeper, anchored in tradition.

But beneath the beauty of the day, something darker was unfolding. The "bite" under my arm had spread across my chest and back, a red, blistering map of pain. I decided it was time to see a doctor before heading into the hills for camping.

The diagnosis surprised me: not a bite at all, but shingles. *Shingles!* As if the universe had decided I needed a plot twist. I stared at the doctor, half amused, half horrified. The road gives, and the road takes — sometimes in the form of a virus you didn't ask for.



Peter picked us up around ten, and we drove to Sungai Sendat. Despite the diagnosis, the day was lovely. Peter prepared a feast, the weather held, and the forest wrapped around us like a green cathedral. For a few hours, I forgot the burning under my skin.

But returning to Peter's, the pain surged. Shingles is a cruel companion — sharp, electric, relentless. I went back to the clinic, collected antiviral tablets and cream, and stocked up on painkillers with the determination of someone preparing for battle. If the virus wanted a fight, I was ready.

Back at the flatlet, I lay down, exhausted but strangely grateful. Travel isn't just about landscapes and kilometres; it's about the people who catch you when you falter, the kitchens where you're fed, the rooms where you heal, the festivals you're invited into. These days in Puchong were not glamorous, but they were deeply human — a reminder that journeys are made not only on the road, but in the quiet spaces between.



By mid-January, my days in Puchong had settled into a strange rhythm — part recovery, part logistics, part waiting for the universe to cooperate. The shingles burned beneath my skin like a secret fire, but the antiviral tablets were beginning to take the edge off. I moved slowly, carefully, as if my body were made of thin glass.

Then, at last, the documents I'd been waiting for arrived.

I gathered my papers, tucked them into a folder, and ventured into the city centre. Kuala Lumpur's heat wrapped around me like a heavy shawl, and the traffic roared in every direction. Embassies always feel like portals — places where your life is temporarily reduced to signatures, stamps, and the whims of officials who hold your fate in their hands.

When I finally returned to Peter's, exhausted but hopeful, I discovered the most crucial document hadn't been signed at all. A missing signature — one small stroke of a pen — had undone an entire day.

I stared at the page, feeling the kind of frustration that sits low in the stomach. Travel teaches patience, but it doesn't make you immune to irritation. I would have to do it all again.

As if to underline the point, my attempts to withdraw money were declined — three times. Each time, the ATM insisted the transaction had failed, yet the money still vanished from my account. I stood there in the fluorescent glow of the machine, feeling a mix of disbelief and resignation. The road gives, the road takes, and sometimes the road simply laughs at you.



Thankfully, Peter was there — steady, generous, unflustered. It's humbling, the way kindness appears exactly when you need it most.

The next days passed in a haze of rest and low-grade pain. The shingles spread across my chest and back like a map drawn in fire. I stocked up on two different types of painkillers, determined to wage war on the virus. Some moments were manageable; others were sharp enough to steal my breath.

Travel isn't always about landscapes and adventure. Sometimes it's about paperwork, painkillers, and the quiet determination to keep going. These days in Puchong were not glamorous, but they were necessary — a reminder that journeys are stitched together from all kinds of moments, not just the beautiful ones.

THE SECOND EMBASSY VISIT AND THE LOCKED BANK ACCOUNT

By the time the 20th rolled around, I felt like I had become a regular fixture in the embassy's waiting room — a weary traveller orbiting the slow, indifferent machinery of officialdom. But this time, I walked in with a quiet determination. I had rehearsed my explanations, organised my documents, and steeled myself for whatever bureaucratic obstacle might appear next.



To my surprise, the process went smoothly. Papers were stamped, signatures were checked, and the official nodded with the solemnity of someone granting passage to another chapter of my life. I walked out into the bright Kuala Lumpur sun feeling lighter, as if a knot that had been tightening for days had finally loosened.

But the universe, ever fond of balance, had another test waiting.

My visit to the bank — the one I hoped would resolve the frozen account and the vanished ATM withdrawals — dissolved into a polite but immovable wall. After explaining the situation, after waiting, after being transferred from one counter to another, the verdict was delivered with the calm finality of a judge:

There was nothing they could do.

If I wanted my account unlocked, I would need to visit a Bangkok Bank branch in Thailand.

I stared at the teller, half amused, half exasperated. The solution to a Malaysian banking problem lay across a border, in another country entirely. Travel has a way of turning even the simplest tasks into international quests.

I stepped back out into the heat, the city buzzing around me, and let the news settle. It wasn't the answer I wanted, but it was an answer. And at least Thailand was already on my horizon.



Back in Puchong, Peter greeted me with the same steady kindness he had shown since the moment I arrived. His home had become a refuge — a place where I could rest, heal, and gather myself before the next stretch of road. The shingles still burned beneath my skin, but the antivirals were slowly winning the battle. I moved more easily now, breathed more freely.

That evening, I sat in the quiet of the flatlet, the hum of the fan filling the room, and felt a strange mixture of frustration and gratitude. Bureaucracy had tested my patience, my body had tested my resilience, and yet — I was still moving forward. Still on the road. Still held up by the kindness of people who had no obligation to help me, yet did so without hesitation.

Travel isn't just about landscapes and kilometres. It's about these moments — the ones that challenge you, humble you, and remind you that the journey is as much internal as it is external.

Thailand awaited. A bank awaited. A new chapter awaited.

And I was ready to meet them all.



LEAVING MALAYSIA, ARRIVING IN THAILAND

My flight to Bangkok wasn't until noon, but I woke early, the way travellers do when a transition is coming. I packed my panniers with the familiar ritual of someone who has done it a thousand times: roll, fold, tuck, tighten. The bicycle and panniers stayed behind at Peter's — another kindness added to the long list he'd given me.

The flight to Bangkok was uneventful, the kind of short hop where everyone sits politely, avoiding eye contact, silently negotiating elbow space. I stared out the window at the clouds, feeling that familiar mix of excitement and melancholy that comes with leaving a place that has held you — even imperfectly.

Just before reaching my little “emergency bunker,” I ran into my neighbours, Peet and Charmy. They greeted me with the easy friendliness that seems to come naturally to long-term expats, and before I knew it, we were sharing a few beers. The conversation flowed, the laughter came easily, and by the time I stumbled home, I felt the pleasant fuzziness of arrival.

Morning arrived with a sense of purpose. First on the agenda: the bank. I walked there early, determined to finally resolve the card issue that had shadowed me since Kuala Lumpur.

The process took most of the morning — forms, signatures, polite smiles, the usual dance of bureaucracy — but eventually, I walked out with a new bank card in hand. A small victory, but a satisfying one.



Back in my room, I tried to log in to the banking app and couldn't. Locked out again. I stared at my phone, half laughing, half groaning. Some problems, it seems, refuse to resolve themselves neatly.

I decided to leave it for the next morning. Even this, I reminded myself, will end.

The afternoon drifted by quietly. After weeks of movement, illness, paperwork, and uncertainty, the stillness felt like a balm. I let myself rest, knowing the road — and the next chapter — would unfold soon enough.

Epilogue

Malaysia didn't give me the journey I expected. It gave me something stranger and better—detours, kindness, storms, bureaucracy, and a virus that arrived like an unwanted plot twist. But it also gave me people who opened their homes, landscapes that softened the hard days, and a reminder that travel is stitched together by the unexpected. The documents were signed, and the pain eased.

The chapter closed, but the thread kept running.



About this Blog

This blog documents my ride in Malaysia from the Thailand border to Kuala Lumpur. There are numerous roads, and the route described in this blog is not necessarily the best. If you intend to use this blog as a guide for your own cycle tour, please bear in mind the following points:

The distances

Please note that the daily distances recorded in this blog may not always be the shortest route, as I occasionally deviate from the main path. However, the daily kilometres recorded were accurate according to my odometer.

Time of year and date

This blog documents my visit to Malaysia in January 2025. It's important to note that many things may have changed since then. The roads may have been improved or deteriorated, and the places I stayed in might have been upgraded or demolished.

Insurance

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

Clothing

During a cycling holiday, we spend most of our time riding, 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 in higher-elevation areas, 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, Shimano Deore components, Alex 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.



Discovering Malaysia: A Vibrant Tapestry of Culture and Nature

Capital City: Kuala Lumpur

Welcome to Kuala Lumpur, the beating heart of Malaysia! This modern metropolis boasts a stunning skyline adorned with the iconic Petronas Twin Towers. Here, you'll find a delightful blend of bustling markets, trendy shopping districts, and a thriving food scene, offering every amenity you'd expect from an extraordinary capital city.

Currency: Malaysian Ringgit (MYR)

When exploring this beautiful country, you'll use the Malaysian Ringgit (MYR). Currently, 1 MYR is about 0.25 USD, and it is represented by the symbol RM. This makes it a great place to enjoy a variety of local delicacies without breaking the bank!

Language: A Melodic Blend

While Bahasa Melayu (also known as Bahasa Malaysia) is the official language, you'll be pleased to find that English, Mandarin, and Tamil are widely spoken too. This linguistic diversity adds to the rich cultural atmosphere, allowing you to connect with locals in various ways.

Religion: A Spectrum of Beliefs

Religion in Malaysia is as diverse as its people. With Islam as the predominant faith, the country also embraces a multitude of beliefs—including Buddhism and Taoism among the Chinese community, Hinduism within the Indian population, and a minority of Christians. This harmony of religions creates a vibrant spiritual landscape that's captivating to explore.

Location and Size: A Geographical Gem

Nestled at the southernmost tip of the Asian continent, Malaysia is a geographical wonder. It's primarily divided into two regions: the Malaysian Peninsula and Malaysian Borneo, alongside a staggering 878 islands. Famous spots like Langkawi, Penang, and the Perhentians beckon with their breathtaking beauty and adventure opportunities.

Population: A Melting Pot of Cultures

With a population exceeding 30 million, Malaysia ranks as the world's 114th most populous country and is home to a rich tapestry of cultures. About 50% Malay, 23% Chinese, and 7% Indian people coexist, each contributing their unique flavours, festivals, and traditions to the vibrant Malaysian culture. Beyond the bustling urban areas, the countryside offers lush landscapes where you can escape the crowds and immerse yourself in nature.

Internet Coverage: Stay Connected

In today's digital age, staying connected while you travel is essential. Malaysia boasts extensive internet coverage, especially in urban areas, making it easy for you to share your adventures and stay in touch with friends and family back home.

Embark on an adventure to Malaysia, where every corner offers a new experience, and every interaction is an opportunity to learn about its beautiful diversity!



About the Author

Hailing from the 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 route that would take her the entire distance 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.





**The beauty of living on a bicycle is the uncertainty of the day, who
you'll meet, or where you'll end up.**



