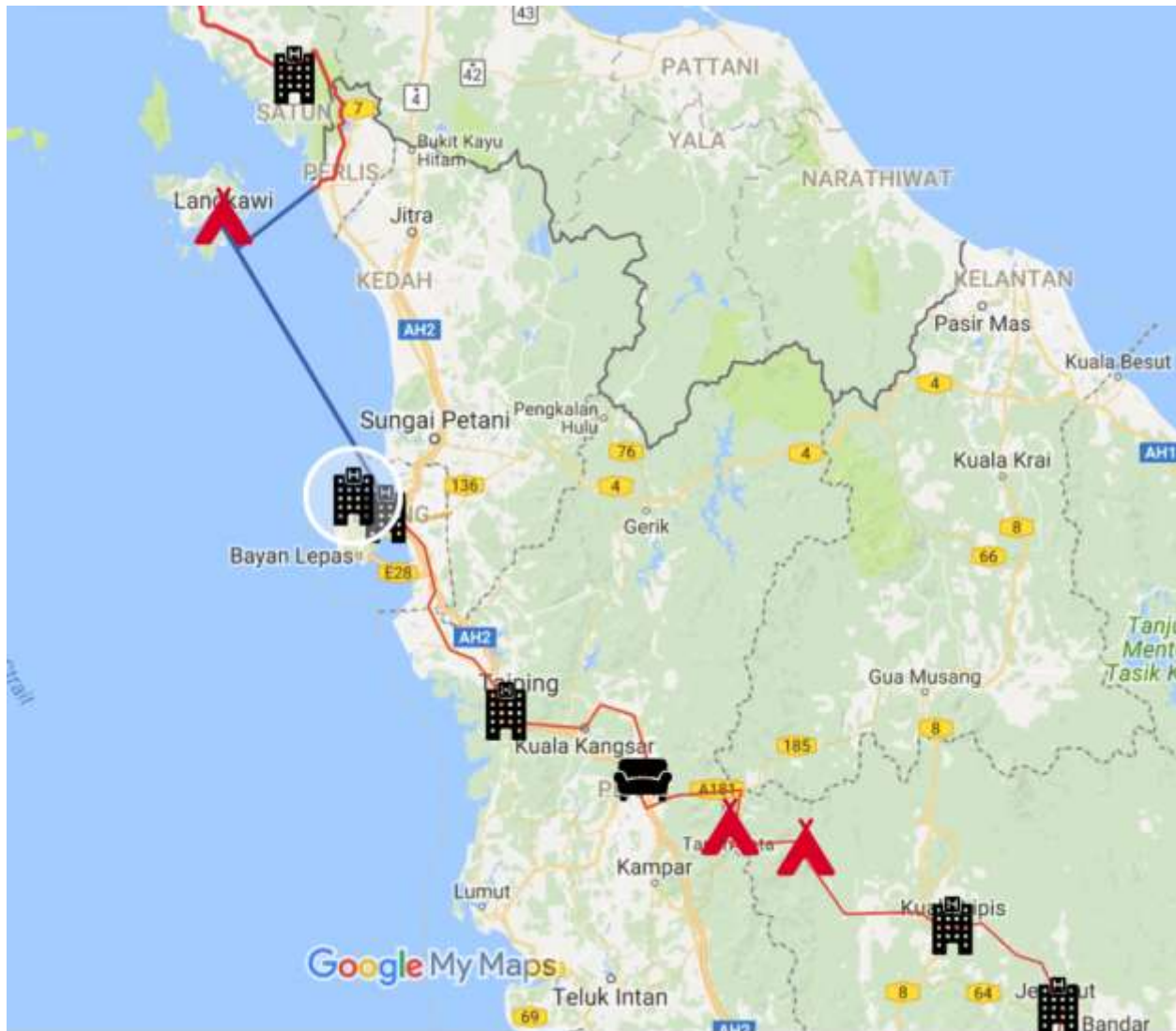


Season 6 – Part 6. Malaysia II.



Sa 2.4.2016, day 265. Rest day. (Kuala Lipis – Kuala Lipis; 0km)

We took the day nice and slowly, had some nice roti for breakfast, went to do the laundry and had another coffee at the best ice coffee place in town. We already had a coffee there the day before and the girl had taken some photos of us and posted them on Facebook, so when we arrived again we were instantly recognized. Thinking back on the day, it seems to me we spent most of the time eating at one place or another or having a coffee at some place. There was also a very nice terrace on the third floor of the hotel to sit out and relax.

The big story of the day however was an e-mail that I saw the night before. It was an answer from a job I had applied for as Associate Professor in Trondheim, Norway. Apparently I was ranked #3 on the list of candidates and they were inviting me over to Norway to hold a presentation and do an interview on the 21st of April. This really got me into making very fundamental thoughts about our future. Of course being #3 didn't mean I had a very big chance of getting the position, but still I had to decide if I wanted to fly to

Norway, buy a suit somewhere and some nice shoes, prepare a 45 min lecture on “solutions and their application to metallurgy”, which was the topic they wanted me to lecture on and then fly back to continue biking. After long reflections I decided to withdraw my application. For me the time simply has not yet come to commit to a job like that. After all we still have $\frac{3}{4}$ of the world to circumnavigate!

Siria also had her own logistical problem to contemplate: Fabienne, a very good friend of ours, is getting married in September and of course the question is, what shall we do? Not go to the wedding? Interrupt the trip for 1-2 weeks and fly home? Plan to be home by then?? This is also something that we will have to sort out in the coming weeks or months...





Su 3.4.2016, day 266. Encounter with two other world cyclists going the other way (Kuala Lipis – C165, 95 km)

We got up quite early and were on the road before 8am. It was already really hot and humid. Luckily the sun was somewhat hidden by some hazy clouds. We had spent quite some time checking out the route up towards the Cameron Highlands, as it was a long ride (120 km) and looked to be very hilly indeed. The final elevation was about 1500 m, which is not extreme, but our elevation calculator (www.doogal.co.uk) said that we would have 4500 m altitude up to climb, which indicates that the road would be a grueling succession of small hills and small descents. Also there didn't seem to be much by way of shops or villages along the road.

So off we went. After 20 km we reached the last village, where we bought about 10l of water and some more food. We also sat down to have some roti at a place that seemed very popular. We got chatting to a very nice group of plain clothes policemen who were having their coffee break. One of them ended up paying for all our coffees and rotis! We then headed off, turned into the mountain road C165, that had a very nice shoulder to ride on and biked up through the jungle. The scenery was absolutely wonderful, with lush vegetation of huge trees, ferns, palms, ivy, bamboo. And the sound of birds and insects coming out of the forest was at times a deafening cacophony.

After some further 20 km or so we arrived at a small rest place with a shop and some tables and chairs. We sat down for some drinks and food and to take a break from the midday heat. Just then two touring bicyclists arrived. It turns out they were a French couple, who had left Venice a bit more than a year ago and had biked down Europe to Turkey, then on into Iran, through the Stan-countries into China, down southwards into Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, they also went through Myanmar and were now heading for Singapore, where they intended to take a long break from biking. It was very inspiring talking to them. Right now, for me it sounds impossible to bike home direction Switzerland, just as it had sounded

impossible to reach LA. And there I was talking to this couple who had actually done it! And talking to them it didn't sound very impossible at all... I really wonder what this trip still has in store for us!

After long chats we said good-bye and we headed off. The road slowly started to climb up into the hills. It was really hot and tough riding. The sweat was simply running down all my body dripping off my nose and chin onto the handlebars. Slowly the shadows started getting longer and finally the sun disappeared behind the green hills. It was time to look for a place to pitch our tent. We found a place that was not too bad at the top of a small little road off the main road hidden in a little dip. Only problem was that they had burnt the shrubbery meaning that everything got black and charred, including our tent, clothes, legs.

We had some toast, bananas and biscuits for supper and then pitched the tent, brushed our teeth and crawled into the tent. There were some bugs out, so we had to keep the mosquito net closed. There was not the slightest breeze and the heat inside the tent was stifling! As I lay there I felt the sweat running off my body and dripping onto the mat. Then we started to see flashes of light. Was it the headlights of the cars on the road below or was it lightning? It turned out to be lightning. A heavy thunderstorm was the last thing we wanted as we were in a bit of a dip and all the vegetation was burnt away so it would turn awfully muddy. Sure enough, the first raindrops soon started to fall. So I got out of the tent to make sure everything was out of harm's way. But finally it didn't rain hard. Just enough to intensify the humid sultry heat. We both didn't sleep much that night.

Mo 4.4.2016, day 267. Into the hills. (C165 – Tanah Rata, 65 km)

We got up when it was still dark, packed our stuff, had some more bananas and toast for breakfast, wondered how the plastic of the toast that we safely packed in our tightly locked food box the night before got ripped to shreds and was now lying round outside the box. Very strange, especially as the box was still locked! We also admired some gigantic centipedes that were milling around. Good thing we hadn't seen them the night before!

And so we headed off. The weather was again stiflingly hot and sticky. The ride was tough and so we slowly sweated our way up the hill. As we started to reach the top we started to see hundreds of greenhouses some of them climbing straight up the steep hills. Turns out that the area is full of vegetable farms growing salad, tomatoes and also flowers. It was very interesting to ride through.

We had lunch of roti, fried rice and noodles in a small restaurant in Ringlet and then climbed the last couple of hundred meters passing some wonderful tea plantations, finally arriving in Tanah Rata. This place was super-touristy. There was even a Starbucks! We couldn't resist...

There was quite a nice campsite at the edge of town. We had a wonderful cold shower, rinsed our clothes that were drenched in sweat and got chatting to a nice young Slovakian guy, who had strung up his hammock close by. We also wondered who would be occupying all the identical tents that were set up in an orderly grid pattern.

We biked into town for dinner and eat a ridiculous amount of food. 4 butter naans with sauces, rice, 2 curries, yoghurt with vegetables. It was great!

When we got back to the campsite the place was full of army jeeps and soldiers everywhere. So this was the solution to the mystery of all the tents! Obviously some military exercise...



















Tu 5.4.2016, day 268. Rest Day (Tanah Rata, 0km)

We slept like logs. Up at 1500m the night was wonderfully cool. We even had to get out our down sleeping bags to stay warm. We started the day extremely slowly. I then got down to the task of trying to fix my Rohloff gear changer that had broken the day before. This was a real nuisance. The bracket holding the shifter in place on the handlebar had snapped. I finally managed to fix it in place using one of the emergency spokes we were carrying. Not very pretty, but it actually worked pretty well. I then set about figuring out how to mount the GoPro camera onto the bike. This is something I should have done long ago. And finally improved the way I attach the walking stick that I am using as a bike stand to the frame using some zip ties. Zip ties are definitively the most useful gadgets we are carrying. So versatile!

We then went for a bit of a walk up into the forest looking for some waterfall that we finally didn't find and then headed down to the town for food and hung out on the computers all afternoon.



We 6.4.2016, day 269. Meeting fellow Swiss and stay with couch surfers (Tanah Rata – Ipoh, 95 km)

Sleeping in the tent up in the cool air of the high altitude was fantastic and we woke up feeling fresh and energetic. Even though the ride of the day was mostly downhill, we still tried to get going early, as we feared there would be a lot of small but nasty hills to climb. The first 20 km or so were indeed mostly uphill, we stopped for some roti for breakfast, and finally reached the highest point and started the very long downhill ride again passing through wonderfully green and lush jungle. It was funny to feel how the air got hotter and hotter as we descended down into the valley. About 3/4 of the way down we saw a couple on heavily packed touring bikers puffing their way up the hill. Turns out it was a Swiss couple who had left Switzerland 2 years ago heading eastwards. They had crossed all of Europe, central Asia, China and the far East. Again it was really interesting talking to them and checking up on their equipment and also really inspiring! Check out their blog under <http://polops.blogspot.my/>.

The last part of the ride, coming into Ipoh, was not much to write home about with big roads and lots of traffic. We finally found the place where we were going to stay. A place called “The Castle” that was on Couchsurfing. Turns out it is quite a nice house, that belongs to some Malaysian businessman, but is currently standing empty and has been taken over by Couchsurfers. Diego from Puerto Rico and Gunthi, his girlfriend from Cambodia, were home when we got there. They had been staying in “The Castle” for 2 months already. Another couple, Sara from Iceland and her Spanish boyfriend had come for one night but were still living there 2 weeks later. They were out when we arrived.

We installed ourselves in one room and had a bucket shower as the only running water in the place was the next door neighbor's hosepipe. Gunthi fried some rice, and tended to Diego, who had a little scratch on his leg and was theatrically helpless.

It was interesting talking to him. He clearly was of the impression that he was living quite a cool life and found it quite incredible that we were only planning to stay for a short time. He proudly talked of adventures he had experienced working as an environmental activist in Cambodia and how he was teaching the locals English and Music. I really find it fantastic that today mainly thanks to internet and social media it is so easy for people like him, who would have great problems adapting to the corset of western societies' norms, to go out into the world and find their way. I was actually looking forward to playing some music with him, but it turns out he doesn't much care for tuning the guitar, his idea of a song is to sing random lyrics and a random melody that he just makes up on the spot to some standard 3 chord progression. For me "jamming" with him was quite a painful experience as his flute playing was - let's say- somewhat unorthodox, consisting of some random warbles on a flute that was about 3.5 notes out of tune with the guitar. I guess I am still too tightly bound by the corset of society...

In the evening two locals and Sara and her boyfriend arrived. It turned out that one of the Malayan guys had a newly opened restaurant and the Couchsurfers were helping him with redecorating the place and in exchange he brought them some food.

We passed the evening eating off a rug on the floor and chatting. One of the Malayan guys very kindly offered to give us a ride to the station next morning to catch the 6:30 am train to Kuala Lumpur.







Th 7.4.2016, day 270. Into Kuala Lumpur (0 km).

We were up at 5:30 and waited outside the front door for our ride with Siria's rear wheel that we had to have remade in Kuala Lumpur. Her wheel had the same problem with rusting and breaking spokes that mine had. Luckily there was a Rohloff service partner in KL who was sure to have the right spokes and was sure to do a proper job. Our ride arrived in perfect time and so we got to the station and onto the highly modern and fast train.

First stop in KL was the Burmese embassy to get our Visa. It took us about 1h to get there using the subway and then a long walk along busy roads in the sultry heat. When we arrived we were informed that now the Visas were handled by an agent that was located right next to the railway station where we had arrived. So we made the whole trip out to the embassy for nothing!

The Visa process turned out to be unbelievably easy. We simply filled out a form, handed in our passports, two passport photos and a copy of our passports, payed the fee and were told to pick up the passports the same day at 4:30 pm. And we had imagined it would be so complicated...

Next on the To Do list was my trip down to the Rohloff guy. This turned out to be another adventure. His shop was down a back lane into a nondescript back entry of a Chinese restaurant, up a narrow flight of concrete stairs, along a very narrow balcony and then second door on the left, there he was in his little bike dungeon. He was a great guy and it seems all the world touring bikers stop by his place to fix this and that and he had a whole number of stories to tell about people he met. My favorite is a guy who is travelling round the world without using any motor power but with a paraglider wing that he uses to pull himself along when the wind is right. Hmmmmm. Only a question of time before I try this with my kite...

He was also a big bike expert, knew everything about the problem with the Sapim spokes used on both our bikes and agreed to rebuild the wheel for a total of 50\$. I had paid 200\$ in San Francisco for my wheel! He also gave me a spare bracket for my shifter that broke a couple of days ago and also a T20 bit that is needed for all Rohloff parts and that I was still missing in my tool collection. Both for free!

I met up again with Siria in Low Yat Mall, a huge electronics mall, where she was checking prices to get her Airbook screen fixed and then we went to Matteo's place. Matteo is an old high school friend of Siria's and now has his own marketing agency in KL with 40 employees and growing fast.

He was an absolutely terrific guy! We went out to some street market together and ate an insane quantity of food, washed down with ample amounts of beer. My favorite was the sweet rack of ribs, least favorite were the frog's legs. Looking at the size of the bones, I did wonder how big the frog was. I certainly would not like to find such a frog in the tent in the dark, that's for sure, especially after having eaten his friend's legs...

The place we were staying was a top modern apartment high-rise right in the center. It was a really luxurious place with pool, gym, squash court, the works. It felt so good to have a proper shower and comfortable bed in a room with good air-con. We slept like logs!





Fr 8.4.2015, day 271. Hanging out in KL (0 km).

We had a luxurious long sleep, only barely hearing how Matteo left for work. We finally managed to crawl out of bed and dragged ourselves out and down the street to the first street corner restaurant we came across to sit down and have coffees and the obligatory rotis for breakfast.

The only thing on our To Do list for the day was to visit the Petronas Towers. I'm somehow really into skyscrapers, I find them fascinating and I wasn't disappointed by the Petronas towers. They are great buildings with a wonderful stainless steel finish.

The second thing we did, was go back to the Low Yat mall where I lashed out and treated myself to a new camera. I went for the Sony α -5100, basically the new model of my old nex-7 that I bought in Taiwan about 7 years ago and that I was (and still am) very happy with. The only problem is my old camera has been dropped and bashed and mistreated so often, that the picture quality and sharpness has deteriorated.

In the evening we went out for dumplings in a very posh Chinese restaurant with Matteo and some of his colleagues from work. We ended up in an equally posh lounge bar for some beers and listened to a great band that was playing. Conversation was impossible, it was too loud.

For all the trips around KL Mateo used Uber. For me this is definitively a peek at the future of transportation. Before long they will have a fleet of autonomous cars and that will be the end of the private car. I can't wait!











Sa 9.4.2015, day 272. Back to Ipoh (0 km)

For breakfast we headed off to a small and quite well known Chinese market. It was bustling and there were all sorts of foods on sale. One of the things the market is famous for is a coffee / tea mixture. We sat down, ordered three of these brews and took turns to go out on food gathering expeditions. Some of the stuff we found was absolutely delicious, other things (in particular Matteo's slimy fishy noodles) were quite terrible. It was fascinating watching the waiters, mostly quite small and old but incredibly quick and agile, dashing through the crowd carrying almost a dozen coffees per trip.

We finally had far too much food, so we packed up the remains, took an Uber over to the Bike shop, said goodbye to Matteo -it was absolutely fantastic getting to know him!-, collected Siria's perfectly built wheel, took the tube to the railway station and the train back to Ipoh. There, after a long hunt, we finally found a place to get some food, everything seemed closed, and took our very first Uber back to the couch surfing place. Everybody was out, so we had the place to ourselves. I spend a nice evening playing the guitar and enjoying the nice acoustics of the place. We packed our bags, ready for an early start next morning, and settled down for a rather uncomfortable night: it was very hot despite the fan and there were tons of mosquitoes.

















Su 10.4.2016, day 273. Detour to a Durian Orchard (Ipoh – Taiping, 95 km)

The Couchsurfers were up to bid us good-bye from their castle. And so off we went. Most of the day was spent riding on the quite unpleasant road no. 1. There was a lot of traffic and rarely much of a shoulder. But it was flat and we covered good ground. We stopped in Kuala Kangsar for a late lunch. There was a market that was just closing and a quite a nice park by the river. We eventually ended up in a small place where we had the usual chicken and rice. It was the hottest time of the day and we were in no rush to push on. As we were sitting there in the shade, this guy starts talking with us, the usual question: “where are you from?”, “where are you going?”, etc... Turns out his father was an ambassador for Malaysia and he had lived all over the world. He was also a distant relative of the Sultan of Malaysia. He also mentioned that he had an orchard close by with Durians, Soursop and other fruits and also there was a pagoda in the orchard. He invited us to ride over there to take a rest in the shade before continuing our ride. He would join us later after lunch.

We had visions of this idyllic pagoda in the midst of a lush shady orchard with ripe tropical fruit just waiting for us to enjoy, so of course we said we would check it out! The ride there was wonderful, taking us along the river through dense forests and also past an opulent palace of the Sultan, complete with its own huge mosque and helicopter pad. We were really hopeful about this orchard! However; when we finally got there, it was a dry hot plot of land with a couple of sad looking trees surrounded by a high fence and a forbidding black iron gate. The pagoda was a little concrete platform with a roof. We looked at each other and asked ourselves what the heck we were doing here! We quickly turned round and headed back, hoping we wouldn't run into our newly found blue blooded friend!

Our afternoon ride took us over a small hill that was a shit ride. We were still on the busy no. 1 with heavy trucks passing us on our right side as they fought their way up the hill, on our left was the highway separated only by a narrow strip of concrete.

We stopped at the Potato hotel that is right on the no. 1, had a delicious shower and went for some food. For desert we went for McFlurries at the local McDo. By this time Siria was so tired that she could hardly keep herself upright, so pretty soon afterwards we were back in the hotel where Siria collapsed straight on the bed and fell asleep immediately. Really funny to watch!







Mo 11.4.2016, day 274. Over to Penang Island (Taiping – Georgetown, 90 km).

We both slept like logs and didn't hear the alarm clock. We finally woke up at about 8am after more than 10h of sleep, feeling much refreshed. The ride was pretty similar to the day before. Still following the busy no. 1 through densely populated suburban sprawl. But again we made good time and arrived at the ferry terminal in Butterworth to catch the ferry to Penang Island. Taking the ferry was fun, we in the middle of hundreds of scooters and the ride cost us all of 1\$ for the two of us.

We stayed at the Broadway Budget Hotel, the same place the Swiss bikers we met on the way down from the Cameron Highlands stayed at. Nothing better than a word of mouth recommendation!

Georgetown on Penang is a really nice but very touristy city. We had a nice stroll down along the seaside where there was a very nice cooling breeze blowing. Could this mean kitesurfing? The wind seemed just about strong enough, but it wasn't really possible to rig everything up in the city. But we decided there and then to head off to some of the beaches in the north of the island the next day in hope of getting in some kite surfing. We had dumplings and some huge fresh lemonades at one of the food courts that Georgetown is famous for. Afterwards we ended up in a very nice bicycle themed café right in the tourist heart of the town.







Tu 12.4.2016, day 275. Street art and beaches. (Georgetown – Batu Feringgi, 20 km)

After some great croissants and coffee at the jungle bakery we had a small tour of Georgetown with our bikes to check out the street art for which the city is famous. For me it was quite fascinating to see how some rather simple murals and art installations can become such a tourist magnet. One of the most well-known pieces of art is a bicycle concreted to the wall and two children painted on the wall as if they are riding the bike. There were queues of people standing in front of this installation waiting to take their picture!

We checked out at about midday and rode 20km northwards to Batu Feringgi, had some very tasty but somewhat overpriced lemon chicken and pineapple fried rice washed down with unsweetened lime juice and found a simple hostel for 15\$ per night. We spent the afternoon relaxing and waiting for wind that unfortunately didn't come. In the evening we strolled through the night market, that was basically selling Chinese junk, had some nice Indian food and ended up in front of laptops in Starbucks.













We 13.4.2016, day 276. Waiting for wind... (Batu Feringgi, 0 km).

It was a wonderful relaxing day doing nothing at all, just waiting for kite surfing wind that never came. I can't even begin to describe how nice it is to just do nothing all day without having the feeling that I MUST do something, that I'm wasting my time not being productive. Simply living in the moment, not dwelling on the past and not being concerned about the future. I'm really convinced that compulsory intermediate retirement for everyone between the ages of 40 and 43 would significantly reduce burn-outs, mental and other health problems, improve family harmony and coherence, etcetc. In the whole society would benefit greatly!



Th 14.4.2016, day 277. Ferry to Langkawi (Langkawi, 0 km)

There are 3 ferries per day from Penang to Langkawi, one at 8:15 one at 8:30 and one at 2pm. We wanted to catch the one at 8:15, which meant that we would have to be on the road at 6am. However, we got to bed quite late the night before, so we decided to set the alarm clock for 5:30, see how we feel and decide if we really want to catch the morning boat. So 5:30 the alarm went off, we looked at each other, turned the alarm off again and went straight back to sleep. How could we even think of wanting to catch the early morning ferry??

We finally got up nice and late, packed our bags, said goodbye to the Indian guy running the place and biked back to Georgetown. We got to the ferry terminal with plenty of time to spare, bought the tickets and looked for a place to have some breakfast. The ferry was a speedboat with aircraft-like seating and unfortunately no way of going outside to enjoy the wonderful island landscape and the fresh air.

Langkawi seemed a quite touristy place. We didn't really have a plan of where to stay and we both didn't really feel very interested in exploring the island. Between the ferry terminal and the town of Kuah there is a huge and actually very nice park, right along the coastline. We decided to simply sleep in the park. So we went to find some place to have dinner, then we found a nice spot on the beach to read and to enjoy the sunset. There were hardly any mosquitoes, so we decided not to pitch our tent but to simply sleep on our mats underneath a pagoda. This turned out to be a big mistake. Sometime after midnight the mosquitoes came out and soon we were itching all over and trying to hide in our silk sleeping bags. A couple of times I was woken up, startled by the downdraft of bats swooping very close over my face. Once I was woken up by some loud thrashing and splashing from a pond close by. Probably a python or monitor lizard on the hunt. Not really a very soothing sound to hear at 4am!











Fr 15.4.2016, day 278. Into Thailand! (Kuala Perlis – Khuan Don, 85 km)

We both didn't sleep much that night, and were up and ready to go well before sunrise. We biked through the dark park towards the ferry terminal where there was not much going on. We organized tickets and waited for the ferry to be ready for boarding. It was absolutely packed with locals, not a tourist in sight. Luckily no-one had any baggage, so we found space to stow away our absurd amount of

bags and the trailer. The bikes went on deck. We were both fast asleep when the ferry left and only woke up again when we arrived.

We had some breakfast (Roti again) in Kuala Perlis and then headed off into the Thale Ban National Park and the Thai border. It was quite a nice ride through forests with steep limestone outcrops but very hot. Just before arriving at the border there was a very steep pass to overcome. We sweated our way up the switchbacks and were once again surprised by how fit we have become. We even had the energy left to ride up an extra hill to a view platform.

After that it was downhill all the way. Just before the border we found a place to have some lunch and were given some great mangoes by one of the locals. Siria started chatting to him explaining that we back home we only know one type of mango, but here there are so many different ones and they all taste so different! After a while the guy laughed and said: "I don't understand what you are saying!". Probably the only English words he knew. I laughed.

The border crossing was a bit of a pain, with a bit of waiting around in queues but in the end not very complicated. And so we entered Thailand, the twelfth country of our travels. Funny thing was that I got a 30 day visa with my UK passport, Siria only got 14 days with her Swiss passport. Borders, immigration and customs are for me the most bizarre, arbitrary and useless institutions that our society still seems to cling on to. Huge waste of money time and effort, that's all they are for the vast majority of people and for a chosen few they are a cash cow.

Right on the other side of the border there was a market with lots of little restaurants. So we exchanged the last of our Malay Ringis and had our first Thai meal. Definitely spicier and also tastier!

We biked on a bit to the next town where Siria knew from other bicyclists that we met that there was a very good and cheap guest house. After a bit of searching we found it. It was brand new and didn't even have a sign up.















