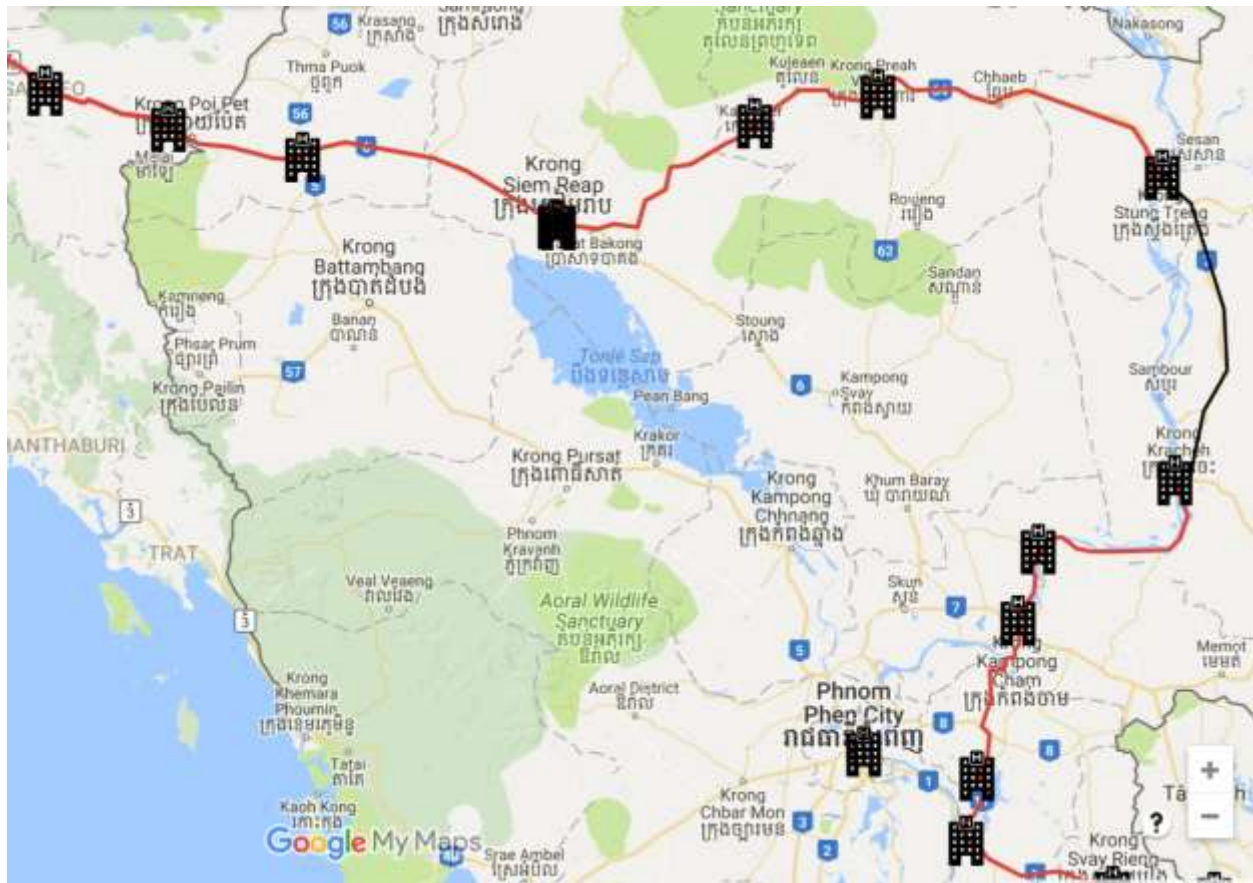


Season 8 – Part 2. Into Cambodia



Mo 30.5.2016, day 323. Into Cambodia! (Aranyaprathet – Sisophon, 55 km)

We slept wonderfully and woke up late at about half past seven. I still had the puncture on my trailer to fix and we needed to do some e-banking. Then we packed up and went to the bank to change the rest of our cash. We were still carrying some Singapore and Canadian dollars that we probably won't be needing anymore. We changed everything into US dollars, as this is what is mainly used in Cambodia. We then biked off towards the border. We decided to honour the great café culture of Thailand by visiting one of these cute little places that can be found everywhere along the road one last time for a cappuccino frappe. Then we arrived at the chaotic border. Everywhere there were signs up saying "Visa Office" and more or less official looking people waving us over saying "You must get Visa here!". Of course we ignored all of them and biked straight past them. We found the Thai Customs and got our passports stamped and then headed towards the Cambodian border. There two officially dressed customs officers sitting by the side of the road asked us for Visa, we said we had none and they took our passports and proceeded to fill out the forms. Then they asked us for 35\$. We knew it was only 30\$, so we asked since when was it 35\$? Then we found out that the official Visa office was in a building right behind these two guys, where there was also a sign up saying Visa 30\$. Quite incredible how they all try to cheat you! But finally we got the Visa for the official 30\$, went to the customs, got our passport stamped and that was that, we were in Cambodia! Time to ceremoniously stick the 14th flag to our flag pole!

Biking in Cambodia felt very good, there were smiles everywhere and cheery waves. It reminded me very much of Myanmar, except that here people have nice white teeth and not the terrible ugly dark red or black teeth discoloured by chewing betel nuts that they have in Myanmar.

We made a quick stop and had a papaya salad at the roadside in one village and then soon arrived in Sisophon, where we checked into Lucky Guesthouse. A fantastic place at only 8\$. Then we had a stroll round town, had some noodles but still felt hungry. We then saw that people were eating French baguettes, what a wonderful relict of the colonial times! We saw them advertised on the menu of a restaurant down the street, we pointed at the picture of the baguettes and said "Two!". What we didn't realize was that the baguettes came with a stew. So basically we had two dinners...

In the evening I felt peckish again, so went out to hunt for some food. It was dark and the park right beside the hotel was infested with ladyboys, it was actually quite scary walking along the park. I finally found a place that was open and sat down for some fried rice. Quite soon the guy running the place sat down with me to share a beer, then another one, then another guy came and soon there was a whole party going on and the empty beers started to pile up... I'll regret this tomorrow!









Tu 31.5.2016, day 324. Long, long biking day. (Sisophon – Siem Reap, 110 km)

We had our usual oatmeal for breakfast, this time with very sweet soya milk and hit the road. The ride was dead flat through large fields that were just being ploughed, ready for planting. We stopped after about 20 km for breakfast, then just before we had covered 50km we met a girl on a touring bike coming the other way. We stopped and had a very nice chat. Unfortunately there was no shade in sight and the temperature was quite unbearable. It turned out that this was the girl who we had heard about who had her bike stolen in Hanoi. In general she had had quite a hard time in Vietnam. It also turns out that she rode with Val and Pif, the couple we met in Myanmar riding on the Pino, for a while. The biking community is certainly quite small, seems we are bumping into everyone that is bumming their way around Asia! We finally said our goodbyes and we hope to meet again at the Mekong, the chances are quite good, as we plan to ride down the Mekong direction Phnom Penh and she is planning to go to Phnom Penh first and then ride up the Mekong.

We then continued our ride. The sky went black and the wind started blowing in our faces making progress tough. In addition, there was a long construction site meaning that we were riding on a dirt road for a long time, not making our lives much easier. We stopped again for some drinks and wondered if we would have to ride through the storm that was brewing. It somehow looked as if it would pull past us and so we pushed on. And indeed we were lucky, we didn't get a drop of rain, but all the fields to the left and right were flooded with water, so we obviously just missed a deluge.

Arriving in Siem Reap was like arriving on a different planet. The road was lined with one luxury resort hotel after the other and the roads were full of air conditioned mini-vans, tuk tuks and golf carts

transporting the tourists to and from the archaeological sites. We stopped to indulge in a mocha frappe with loads of cream on top.

The hotel Siria had booked was excellent run by a very friendly German guy. We could bring the bikes inside so didn't have to worry and could relax and look forward to two days of indulgence.

In the evening over dinner we started discussing the plan of the trip again. Currently the plan is to go as far as Japan. We should be there by October. But the big question is what will we do afterwards? Winter will be coming and biking overland towards Europe will certainly not be feasible. We started thinking what it would look like if we skipped Japan? The discussion ended out to be quite a difficult one.











We 1.6.2016, day 325. Relaxing in Siem Reap. (0 km)

Siem Reap is definitively like a different world. Packed with tourists and consequently packed with establishments catering to the modern backpacker's needs. Pub street with one bar after the other selling beer for 50c, cafés, restaurants, hotels and hostels, (we saw one hostel with dorm beds for 99 cents!), markets selling all the usual tee shirts, baggy trousers and souvenirs. Even just walking around is a hassle, permanently having to say "No thanks!" to tuk tuk drivers, "No thanks" to massage ladies, "No thanks!" to people trying to get you to go to some bar or show or restaurant and "No thanks!" to the guy in the shady corner saying "Marihuana?".

We went separate ways for the day so we both could sit down and focus on trying to figure out how we should continue our trip. While I was deeply dug into finding out about wind conditions in Mui Ne, Vietnam, I got a WhatsApp from Siria with a link to the world's highest altitude Kite race, an event that we heard about from Fred and Brigitte, two Swiss touring cyclist we met in Malaysia. This race would take us to Central Asia. So this is the new plan? Sounds wonderful to me!! As I checked up on the race I saw that Kathrin, a girl we met in the Philippines who is a world class kite surfer, is also going. How small the world is!

We were both very upbeat in the evening, happy that we found a nice plan, and we celebrated with Frozen Margueritas and Nachos at a Mexican place. Unfortunately, it will mean that we have no time for Japan, but Japan will not run away...

Th 2.6.2016, day 326. Visit to Angkor Wat (Siem Reap, 0 km)

We got up at 4:30 and took the hotel's bikes to bike out to the temples for which Siem Reap is famous. We didn't dare take our own bikes as we judged the place, being a tourist place, to be not really very safe. We biked the de-tour to the ticket office. (The ticket office used to be right on the road from Siem Reap out to the Angkor Wat temple, but then the location was changed and it is now next to a museum that was sponsored by North Korea. Apparently no-one ever went to the museum and so the North Koreans asked and probably bribed the Cambodians to move the ticket office, hoping that some of the tourists that buy a ticket also go and visit the museum. But in fact no one even notices the museum.)

There were hordes of people all arriving with their private tuk tuk, all queuing for the ticket. We were a bit late and it was funny to see how everyone was rushing and running, anxious not to arrive too late to have that one shot of the temple with the sun rising behind it.

We then biked off to the spot where everyone goes to watch the sun rise: a pond in front of the Angkor Wat temple. The shot everyone is after is the one with the temple's reflection on the water with the red sky in the background. Hundreds of people were there, all with flashing cameras, smart phones, tripods, it was really quite a spectacle.

We spent some hours touring the temples, which are really quite spectacular, taking care to head back to the hotel in time for breakfast. We then changed hotel, moving to a cheaper place and took a nice long midday nap. In the afternoon I decided to take another trip out to the temples in order to make the most of the 20\$ day ticket and I am really glad I went to the effort, as I had my very own magical temple moment. I basically followed some small roads I saw on MapsMe that were off the small and large circle where all the tourist tuk tuks go. The roads were tiny footpaths through the forest, I came to a small iron suspension bridge over a river and a bit further along was a small temple right in the middle of the forest illuminated by some slanting rays of the evening sun through the forest canopy. There was not a soul anywhere to be seen or to be heard, just the sounds of the birds and the insects. The temple was not really renovated and the inside was just a jumble of rocks, but what a difference it makes to stumble upon a place like this unexpectedly and have it for yourself!











