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DANNY BEER

Danny does Laos and Cambodia



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«Издательские решения»

Beer D.

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Cycling around the world? Has anyone done it? Tour diaries from Danny Beer, an Australian guy, who found his passion in exploring the cities by bike and made his dreams come true. His daily adventures are shared on the pages of four different books. This book is about Laos and Cambodia. Four weeks from Vientiane to Kratie. 1,338 km (831 miles) over 31 days from January 13, 2006 to February 12, 2006

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Introduction: Bangkok Airport Friday January 13, 2006

I guess this will serve as an introduction as any. I write this half-drunk at Bangkok airport, in between flights. I turned down a night out on the town in return for a little solitude and a slightly greater chance of making my 6:00 AM flight to Udon Thani.

This is a long deserved holiday. Four weeks cycling in Laos and Cambodia. It is a long overdue rest away from it all. I am escaping an intolerable colleague, who only today treated me like a dog in front of my students and boss, and some weird stalker who calls twenty times a day yet won't say a word whenever I answer. I need to distress. I hope that the cycling may help to relieve some of it.

This is probably my first trip of which I have planned so much. That said, this is my first cycling trip in excess of three days. But it is as yet entirely planned. There are still a few uncertainties of which I haven't even begun to plan. I've winged it before.

This was, originally, a solo trip. Indeed I am quite alone whilst writing this now. I did invite my friend Ken along, my cycling buddy in Taiwan. At first he couldn't come but then jealousy started to overcome his sense of logic. He booked a flight to leave nine days after mine and to return on the same day, due to work commitments. Two days after he booked his flight he finds out that his boss got confused and he could leave a week early after all. He was unable to change his ticket date though.

Two or three days ago Ken informs me that he might be able to meet up with me a little earlier. His application for residency has been denied and he will need to do a visa run sooner. So maybe he'll meet me in Vientiane. Maybe a little further down. It is all very uncertain for him until he comes to Bangkok in three days time and tries to get another visa at the Taiwan consulate, or whatever office they call themselves as Thailand do not recognize them as a separate sovereign state. Heck, even I almost landed in trouble trying to leave Taiwan. I was taken aside at passport control because some government agency had failed to cancel a disused re-entry permit. Don't worry though as I have another, valid, one.

So yeah, the plan for the next few days I catch a 6:00 AM flight to Udon Thani. Then I buy a bicycle. Then I ride the 55km to the border, over the friendship bridge, and into Vientiane. Then I plan to book a flight up to Luang Prabang. I'll take the bus back down to Vientiane, via Vang Vieng, spending a couple of days in each. I have pretty much decided to leave my bike somewhere in Vientiane. I do not want to do any long distance cycling in these few days and figure that it will only prove to be a hindrance on the plane and buses.

So that's about it. Saturday is sure to be one long random day. I'm not sleeping tonight so I'm not quite sure how I will handle everything tomorrow. At least I won't have to put up with the crap that Ken has to go through.



One night at the airport.

Luang Prabang: Only non-cycling tourist stuff here Sunday January 15, 2006

14—01 I just awoke from a nap so am not quite all there at the moment. I am in Luang Prabang. I didn't end up buying the bike in Udon Thani. I took the bus instead which, although forcing me to wait three hours at the airport, was dead easy. I almost missed my connecting flight from Vientiane though. The tuk-tuk raced to the airport only for me to have to wait behind some guy arguing about some non-descript non-urgent matter. Each time he asked a different question I had to think to myself 'holiday Danny, you're on holiday', to stop from exploding.

It is now early evening, perfect for taking photos of all the wats in town. But I have other things on my mind. Food and beer.

Unusual thing I noticed today. People often ask where I am from. But I never ask them back. Probably because I really don't care. Or maybe I'm merely too bored/boring to hold a conversation.

A woman outside has a pet monkey. Some young children play with it, laughing wildly. They run close to the monkey. It takes a swipe at them. The children run back, laughing. One child runs forward and trips over his brother. He falls flat on his face. There doesn't seem to be any serious damage done but he cries anyway in the manner of all small children. I laugh.

15—01 Nothing overly exciting happened today. In short, I woke up late then walked around town taking photos. I booked a minivan ticket to Vang Vien for tomorrow morning. Luang Prabang is a nice town but it's time for me to move on.

I met a monk last night called Pha (sp?). He was an interesting lad of twenty, intelligent enough and seemed to have met a few people in the last few years. He had been there for six years now but clearly showed signs of wanting a different change of pace. He wasn't shy about showing his dissatisfaction for his sexual oppression, in particular his fondness for Japanese girls. I could only agree.



My first Beerlao.

Vang Vieng and Vientiane: No cycling here either

Wednesday January 18, 2006

17—01 Yesterday didn't mark anything significant or interesting. I took a bus to Vang Vien. The scenery was quite nice. Otherwise the trip was boring. There were a few cyclists about. I kept thinking that it would have been so much better on a bike than in the bus.

Today I went tubing. It was okay but got monotonous quite quickly. And I just couldn't relax after seeing that snake coming towards me across the water. Seeing the police sit behind one of the riverside bars, watching the foreigners drink and smoke dope was also a bit unsettling.

Tomorrow I may do a kayak tour to Vientiane. I need to get there anyway and am getting eager to exert some energy.

18—01 I have arrived in Vientiane and now need to wait until six to meet Ken, just like his note said. It also said that he would find us a couple of rooms which leaves me wandering around town with a couple of heavy bags. So I found this nice restaurant here and sat down and ordered breakfast.

The kayaking went ahead as planned with no major eventualities. The first place wanted to charge more money as there were only the three of us. We soon found somewhere else and we soon (ish) were on our way. There really was only one lot of rapids. It is dry season so the river is low, and therefore slow.

At one point docking on some rocks I left my camera in my dry-bag. Our guide thoughtlessly pulled the other kayak onto mine, and right onto my camera. It seems to be working fine now although a system error message came up at first.



Stupa.

Vientiane: Almost there

Thursday January 19, 2006

My camera is broken. The shutter won't close properly. No biggie though as it still works. I bought an overly expensive bike today, then twice took it back to fix the tires and rims. I almost bought a mountain bike for much less but the pedals almost fell off and the gears wouldn't work properly. In any case, bikes in Taiwan are much cheaper than Laos or Thailand. And of better quality too. I had to buy a rear rack separately and when I showed Ken he immediately bent it back, braking it.

Whilst looking at one of the wats in town a monk invites us to come inside as they pray. A German girl goes inside too and immediately starts taking photos. I leave.

Well, my visa extension is sorted and our bikes are ready. Tomorrow we leave. 100 km. I'm psyched.



My new One hundred and fifty dollar bike.

Vientiane to Thapabat: Away at last Friday January 20, 2006, 93 km (58 miles) – Total so far: 93 km (58 miles)

After an evening drinking beer and playing pool against a transvestite we are finally on our way. 93 km to Thapabat. But first I need to go back to the bike shop and get them to change around my tires. Somebody put them on backwards.

Coming out of Vientiane Ken stops to take some photos of one of the various mansions while I keep riding. I stop in some shade for Ken to catch up. Ken catches up and keeps going. Fair enough. I take off after him but struggle to keep up. His bike is much better and faster than mine. Soon he disappears from view. Eventually I did find Ken, stopped and waiting for me. He hadn't seen me earlier beside the road and had spent the last half hour trying to catch up to me. New rule. Make sure that the other person can see you when you stop. Later I miss Ken when he had stopped. I thought he was far, far ahead only to find him riding directly behind me. Cheeky bastard.

I am already sick of the noodle soup on offer. We had some at lunch time but for dinner that was all the restaurant would serve. There are about six restaurants in town but it seems that together they only know how to cook only one type of meal. So for dinner I have noodle soup. Ken doesn't seem to mind though. He loves the stuff.



Mansion

Thapabat to somewhere: Riding in the dark Saturday January 21, 2006, 131 km (81 miles) – Total so far: 224 km (139 miles)

We did 131 km today. We decided that the 54 km to Paksan wasn't enough for us. Then we had trouble finding another guesthouse. We spent the last hour riding in the dark, which, if we weren't so tired would have made for a pleasant change. The cool evening temperature was certainly welcomed after such a hot day.

The only choice for breakfast was noodle soup. I decide that I would rather buy some custard cakes and find something more substantial for lunch. A head wind slows us down to about 15 km/h all morning. Much less than the 20—25 km/h we did yesterday. I pass some goats crossing the highway and later some geese waddling over the road.



We make it to Paksan for lunch but the only thing on offer is noodle soup. I go to buy some sliced bread leaving Ken to have the soup. Jam on bread makes an okay lunch. We find a restaurant at 4:00 PM which serves greasy omelets and fried rice. The latter appearing more like steamed rice than fried but is still good. However apparently not good enough for the beggar, who had wondered over. I offer him some but I guess he just wants money.

We only have an hour or so of daylight left but decide to press on, probably due to the lack of guesthouses in town. We do find a guesthouse half an hour later but neither Ken nor myself feel desperate enough to share a double bed. We push on.

It got dark. It got very dark. Pretty stars though. Even Vientiane has a pleasant night sky. A good change to the Taipei nightline. We stop and put on our lights. One of those Laos style tractors catch

up with us and we first tag along behind and later go in front, using its light to guide our way. This works for a while until we slow down on a hill and it overtakes us.



Laos tractors.

We do find a guesthouse. There aren't any signs for it and we aren't even sure which town we're in. Again they only have rooms with a double bed so we decide to spring for two rooms. It works out to about US \$3 each. Ken goes for a wash (no actual shower attachment) and I go for a beer (priorities). I find some kind of place and see a fire going. I ask what is cooking (in English and bad sign language) and am soon enjoying a plate of barbequed beef. At last. No more noodle soup!

To Thakhek: Strong coffee and rat on a sticks
Sunday January 22, 2006, 113 km
(70 miles) – Total so far: 337 km (209 miles)

Another big day. 113 km. It starts out hot but cools right down around 4:00 pm. Cucumbers and bread buns for breakfast, not to mention the strongest coffee I have ever had in my life. It is thick like mud. I'm not up for trying the rat-on-a-sticks we see roasting though.



Some very strong coffee.

A pleasant, though hot, enough morning sees us getting lunch at a small town around noon. I order an omelet and Ken some noodle soup. It was made clear that we only wanted one of each dish and yet I am still given my own bowl of noodle soup. I still get my greasy omelet too. Apparently everyone, without exception, orders noodle soup around here.

The next hour sees a distinct lack of places to buy water. We are able to get pepsi no problems but not water. At last we manage to find some shops selling water so stock up, (lest there aren't any more). Perhaps half an hour later I stretch down to get a drink (I have a small bottle hanging next to my front tire) when the bottle gets caught in the spokes. A loud bang, some crunching, and rapid deceleration sees me standing beside the road drenched wet with a crunched water bottle. The bike still seems to work okay though. No broken spokes.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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