

"Barge in teak and bicycle" written by Michel GÉRARD

Nothing is more original than an eco-adventure cruise on board a river barge on the Chawpraya, literally called "the river of the kings", together with the discovery of its surroundings by bicycle.



I will always remember this day when I went on board this twenty-one-metre long and six-metre wide barge made of teak, named "The Floating Treasure", for an unforgettable journey from the capital toward the central plains. Its name was effectively well chosen as during my three-day stay in its wooden belly, I discovered with the rhythm of water a treasure of landscapes hidden from tourists.

The itinerary for the first day was obvious on my map and I left Bangkok without regrets in the direction of Koh Kred, an amazing island in the middle of the river Chawpraya, well known for its traditional pottery. We left by bicycle to explore this place and to buy a few souvenirs from the people of the Mon tribe. The second stage of the day was dedicated to the meeting with the population of Samkok, and a visit to the temple Wat Chedi Lanière, famous for its white jade Buddha. The most spectacular moment during the cruise was probably the chance to admire, on that day, a large number of storks perched in the trees, that we photographed from a twenty metre high observation tower. These Asian storks come to nest very close to the Chawpraya river within the temple Wat Pailom during the wintry season, where they migrate from the north of India and Siberia. Last year more than four thousand of them had been counted at this unique place.

Back on the spacious upper deck of the Asian barge, lying on Thai cushions and with my feet in a relaxing position, I sipped a cool drink in the breeze during the navigation, and recalled this superb day out while several of my friends, a lot less sporty (just kidding!), chose the barge's terrace to tan their skin under the less aggressive sun of that late afternoon. We arrived at Wat Chang Noi situated on the Mae Nam Noi, a small, affluent part of the Chawpraya River, to spend the night.

The agricultural regions on the banks of the Chawpraya are rich in small artisan villages where life goes by more slowly and warmly than in the big metropolis. At the regular stops, accompanied by my mates and our guide Noy, I jumped on my bicycle to explore the unknown land and observe the way of life of its natives. The second day awarded us a visit, after breakfast, to a countryside school for a get-together with the teachers and pupils. That was an interesting experience. We were able to communicate with the children of the village and also gain knowledge of Thai culture through their education system. Our meal was eaten on board and was prepared by the Thai cook who excited our taste buds with some of his special dishes. In the afternoon I joined a group interested in learning the art of Thai cuisine. All together we left by bicycle for the local market to purchase shrimps, a necessary ingredient for the Tom Yam soup.

Before dinner, we sailed again in the direction of Bang Sadej, to visit a temple, and also an orphanage where children, mainly of ethnic tribes, receive an education and a professional training. Riding bicycles toward the main village, it was possible for us to experience the Thai traditions through the villagers and their professional activities, where manual work dominates with the manufacture of hand-made traditional products. We arrived in Pamok in the evening just in time to admire the sunset. The evenings were also very pleasant, with the rolling of the river's small waves, at the cadence of Thai traditional music I chose to read a book. Others started to play chess or converse while admiring the stars.

In the early morning of the third day, the group had the opportunity to practise the offering of food to Buddhist monks dressed in yellow robes, who go along the roads and stop from house to house. This is an unusual sight for a traveller in Thailand. The wooden barge then headed toward Ayuthaya, the former capital of the Kingdom of Siam. Today it is classified as a heritage site of the world by UNESCO. Some of us chose to stay there a few more days, others decided to take the road to Chiang Mai. I returned to the capital, my journey was over.

None of my friends was disappointed during this ecological cruise and adventure that not only allowed us to witness the rural life along the river but also for my friends and I, to spend great moments amidst fantastic friendship...

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Michel Gerard is a Travel author based in Asia. Visit the [Reperages Thailand Travel website](http://www.travel.reperages-thailand.com) for information and ideas of original excursions. Download your *free* ebook: "Stories of Authentic Eco-adventure Destinations for Travellers in Thailand" => <http://www.travel.reperages-thailand.com>