

"Mountain biking from Chiang Dao to the Khok River"

written by Michel GÉRARD

Far from Bangkok with its stress and pollution, a group of cyclists discovers the forest trails of the North at the handlebars of mountain bikes. A healthy hike allows everyone to relish a splendid green setting while observing the lives of the hill tribes.



It is around eight o'clock in the morning when we get on the road, sitting on board a vehicle that drives us to Chiang Dao, the starting point where we will get onto mountain bike saddles. Among the participants of this little escapade of four days, only Michael, a fan of the region of Chiang Mai whose enthusiasm has spread to all, has already participated in a mountain bike hike. The group stops at first for a while in the jungle at an elephant camp in order to observe the pachyderms bathing and showing their skills. Just after that exploration of the region's underground caves will provide some thrills before lunch in a local restaurant.

Relaxed and full of energy, the group checks the mountain bicycles and carries on last adjustments of saddles and handlebars before departure on a countryside road. A short time after, the guide leads us along a dirty path in the direction of villages lived in by tribes of the North. The trip enables all of us to appreciate the landscapes of magnificent greenery and also to inhale some fresh air. We enjoy the numerous stops that permit us to relax and breathe easily and also to cool down while discovering the life styles of the Lahu tribes, Lisu and Akha, with information from Ekachai, our guide. At the end of the day, we arrive at Palaung, a village inhabited by the less privileged of Myanmar and it is with the hospitality of the chief of the village and his family that we dine and sleep.

After a good night spent in the silence of nature and a nourishing breakfast, we are ready to pedal on along the forest trails. Apart from enjoying the magnificent natural sites and the fresh air that we were breathing, this second day is also spent learning more about each other and enjoying this biking hike fully. Riding back along narrow mountain roads we reach a more important village and have lunch. Later in the afternoon, our group visits a temple hidden in the forest and other underground caves. When the evening approaches, we get on board a vehicle for a transfer to Ban Ta Don where we spend the night very close to the banks of the Khok River.

Early in the morning, our group of cyclists enjoys a trip on a dirty track along the river with rice fields and plantations as landscapes. We embark then with the bicycles on a long-tail boat for an hour of navigation along the Mae Khok. We ride the bicycles then and discover a Karen village some kilometres farther, very close to the river. We stay there for some time and observe the life of this ethnic tribe. Close to the end of the day, it is time to think about getting to Chiang Rai. Some of our friends continue to cycle whereas the more tired sit in the aid vehicle that has been following us since the beginning of the hike.

The last day is dedicated to the discovery of new tracks in the surrounding region of Chiang Rai. It has some beautiful mountains to climb and also a waterfall where everybody is able to relax in leisure and get refreshed. There are a lot of other valleys and landscapes to discover, with their ethnic tribes. Those wanting to conclude the journey by a jaunt, on an elephant, are able to do so.

The best things always have an end and we must think now about travelling by vehicle for three hours toward Chiang Mai. There, seated around a table for dinner, our team of cyclists plan a new hike for the next long weekend.

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Michel Gerard is a Travel author based in Asia. Visit the *Reperages Thailand Travel* website 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>