

Biking and Homestay in Mae Taeng



Highlights

This challenging bike tour along the Mae Taeng river in Northern Thailand is guaranteed to get the blood pumping! During the three days of the trip, you'll experience some great riding trails, varied terrain and get to float down the river with your bike strapped to a bamboo raft!

Thailand is a very lush, green country and is so dense with vegetation that it is often difficult to know what is a path and what isn't. Clearly, this can pose a problem for foreigners trying to plan out a hiking or cycling trip - luckily, that's where these guys come in. The lovely ladies and gents who will look after you during your stay in Thailand picked up a Traveller's Choice award in 2008 for their efforts, and it's easy to understand why.

While here you'll be in the care of exceptionally enthusiastic adventure nuts whose knowledge of the area is second to none. And what an area it is - the Mae Taeng District is situated between a nature reserve and a national park, with the river running through it originating high in the mountains. The district is seemingly designed for biking, with a lot of technical passes and the river alongside you making a fantastic riding companion.

It's great to work with people so naturally excited about showing you the best places to tear up some dirt, and the Australian-built bikes are in outstanding condition (they're replaced so often, you might as well class them as new.) Of course, it's not just a biking trip - while taking a break from the lightning-paced cycling, you'll take a (sort of!) leisurely raft tour and get a feel for the culture of Thailand (for instance, seeing a working elephant farm is an experience which will stay with you long after the suntan fades!)

The first day of the itinerary is as challenging as it is rewarding, giving you some unprecedented views from atop the Thai highlands. In what rates on the difficulty scale somewhere between "my lungs are on fire" and "I am about to die," the cycling involves a gruelling 25km uphill cycle to the top of a ridge where all your efforts will be paid off with a mind-shattering view of the surrounding Thai jungles and a very fun ride back down! Day two offers more of the same - although the gradient is a little less severe, you'll cover a longer distance at around 40km. The final day will see you float down the Mae Taeng river with your bike on a bamboo raft and ends with some more optional cycling.

Is it for me?

The tour is set away from the well-beaten track of mainstream Thailand tourism, so if getting hot and sweaty amongst the untamed countryside sounds like your kind of thing then look no further!

The longer three day tour covers a larger distance than its shorter version, and a lot of the cycling is tough to say the least. You don't need to be super-fit to enjoy the trip, but some biking experience and a lot of endurance are somewhat of a prerequisite.

Accommodation

The overnight stay on the first evening will be in a comfortable riverside homestay where you'll be able to enjoy a home-cooked Thai meal and walks in the local area. Breakfast will also be served the next morning to set you up for another full day of cycling.

Prices from

208 GBP (3 days) per person

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On the second evening you'll be staying in a homestead in a village downriver, one of the many operated by the hill tribes of the Chiang Mai region. You'll stay with local hosts and eating a home-made and filling Thai meal - nothing extravagant, but the villagers are very hospitable and friendly, plus it's nice to get a chance to become acquainted with the lovely folk who are lucky enough to call this part of paradise their home.

During each day of the tour the guides will provide high-energy snacks and water when required, and on the third day of the tour you will visit a local restaurant built on stilts by the riverside for an amazing farewell meal.

Itinerary

Day One: Doi Bakia

Your personal guide will pick up from your hotel and transfer you to the starting point of the ride, a series of quiet country roads approaching the base of Doi Bakia mountain. Moving onto smooth dirt roads, you'll embark on a challenging climb to the top of the mountain, travelling through ever-changing vegetation and cooled by fresh breezes. You'll continue up to a magnificent view point and take a deserved lunch break at the hill-station restaurant which is run by tribes people and serving delicious local foods.

Continuing over the back of the mountain you'll have a great downhill dash along some smooth yet challenging single tracks before being picked up by the support vehicle and transported to your riverside homestay. Here you will be able to relax and enjoy the river view, or take a short walk to get a glimpse of some elephants and meet with the Akha and Lisu hill-tribe people coming back from their fields at the end of the day.

Day Two: Mae Taeng River

Your guide will pick you up at your hotel for a morning transfer north of Chiang Mai to the beautiful Mae Taeng river. After a short drive along the river, you'll reach the start of the trail where the day's riding will begin.

You'll spend the day riding smooth and flowing single tracks, with some sizable undulations to get the adrenaline flowing. The trail takes you back and forth over and the Mae Taeng river, using hill-tribe constructed wooden bridges. As the weather can get rather hot, you'll be able to stop and take frequent breaks. During the day you will get to meet locals and visit some beautiful little villages, and by lunch you'll take a refreshing dip in a waterfall and finish with a long enjoyable downhill cycle leading to your host village and the accommodation for the night.

After bathing in the river and having a wander round the village, the group will enjoy a tasty hill-tribe dinner and can sit around the fire and relax with a home-brewed whisky (or two!)

Day Three: Mae Taeng

An early start will see you the group strap the bikes on bamboo rafts for an unforgettable day on the Mae Taeng river. Whilst floating downstream you'll encounter working elephant camps, bamboo spear fisherman and some exciting rapids that will test your skills. By midday, the tour will lead you to a great little restaurant built on stilts over the river where you can enjoy lunch and a well earned rest before finishing off the day rafting some fun sections of river or extra biking, dependant on time and exhaustion levels!

Details

Getting there

You can get to Chiang Mai either by plane, train, or bus from Bangkok.

Price includes

Instructor and guide, equipment hire, water, snacks, two breakfasts, three lunches, two dinners, two nights accommodation, return transport to and from pre-arranged pick-up point.

Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed