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DESTINATION - CHIANG MAI

**Tried & Tested: See Chiang Mai on a bicycle**

By Jeffrey Studebaker

When I took Click and Travels Chiang Mai bicycle tour, I was surprised that, instead of picking me up in a bus and driving to the countryside, we hopped on high-quality touring bicycles in front of the hotel and pedalled our way out of town.

I was even more surprised when it took less than 15 minutes to negotiate Chiang Mai's traffic before I found myself cruising quiet lanes of traditional houses.

Our first stop was a local temple under construction. After seeing dozens of ancient temples, it was very interesting to see a new one in the process of being built. Our guide explained in English the stories behind the interior paintings and how the handmade mosaics and reliefs were created.

After a drink of water it was back in the saddle. The ride was an easy one. Owner, Mr Etienne Daniëls, said he stocked more than 80 bicycles of various sizes and a staff of guides who could handle groups of up to 30 riders. "The advantage of touring by bicycle is that you can see truly unique sites that are off-the-beaten-path, while meeting the locals along the way."

His point was illustrated when, after 15 minutes of cycling along the Mae Ping River, we arrived at a leprosy rehabilitation centre. After pedalling past rows of old buildings that continue to serve as a clinic for the once-feared disease, we stopped for a healthy fruit snack at a factory where the inmates of the clinic crafted high-quality lacquerware.

Our final stop on the journey was an ancient chedi (conical temple) that had been restored. I had no idea where we were at that point, so I was again surprised to find the ride back to the hotel was no more than 20 minutes.

My final surprise came when my guide informed us that in a half-day tour, we had ridden 30km. I did not feel tired in the least, although I thought I might enjoy a traditional Thai saddle massage.

Click and Travel offers tours ranging from a half-day tour around Chiang Mai between 09.00 and 13.30, to six days in the Golden Triangle. Prices start at 850 baht (US\$22).

Website: [www.clickandtravelonline.com](http://www.clickandtravelonline.com)

VERDICT: A pedal-powered trip into the real Thailand.