

Four Countries, Two on a Motorcycle

By David Edinger, Texas

This year my wife chose our vacation locations. She had been working in Yerevan, Armenia and later Jeddah in Saudi. Since she knew she would already be on that side of the world she began her research. Her first destination was Zanzibar an island off of Tanzania. She arrived early to visit the Muslim Souks which she loves to visit and enjoys the art of the bargain.

I left Waco, Texas on the longest economy class flight of my life, which took me to Doha, Qatar. Faced with a 15 hour layover, I grabbed a taxi. This was August and temperatures reached 105 and cooled down to the 90's at night. The taxi driver took me downtown along the corniche and to a modern souk where all the local outdoor restaurants were. Everybody was strolling along or sitting in the cafes drinking juices and some smoking sheesha, a flavored tobacco. I had planned to head back to sleep at the airport after dinner, but it was so hot I was starting to need a shower and after such a long flight I grabbed a hotel for a few winks.

In the morning I boarded a flight to Zanzibar. After confirming our gear bags arrived, I paid \$100 for a visa and departed the terminal to see my wife Missy and 2 drivers waiting for me. She had spent the previous day looking into

motorcycle rentals. Her preferred choice offered to pick me up at the airport. They had to stop for gas on the way and asked her to pay.

Once at the hotel I was informed that I needed to go to the police station and pay \$10 for an authorization to ride on the island. The gentleman said if I gave him my driver's license and the fee, he would do it for me and we would meet at his shop at 10:00 the next day. I crossed my fingers and took the chance. We then walked around Stone Town, the islands largest town eventually stopping to have dinner on the roof of a hotel overlooking the sea while the sunset.

We woke up to some pretty strong storms which stopped by 11:00. We gambled on this trip and brought no rain gear, only our summer perforated gear. A guy brought his old XR250, missing a mirror, the front forks were weeping, the right brake lever was broken but useable, so off we went. We had no GPS or real map, just a tourist map with no road numbers but we never saw any road numbers or street signs anyway. We did the best we could and actually made it out of town, I think on the right road. We stopped and asked twice, showing the map and the locals pointed straight ahead. Then with our boots and jeans already wet from road spray, it started to rain. We

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pulled over and sat in an unfinished concrete building which was occupied by a local who only spoke Swahili. We showed him the map and he indicated we were not on the correct road and we should take a dirt road going to the right. Looking at the dirt/mud I hoped he was wrong. That just couldn't be right! Before we pulled out I walked up to another guy who also pointed at the dirt road. So off we went with my wife tossed around on the back seat with all the pot holes. I tried to get her to stand up with me as we did on our last Africa trip but she said the right passenger peg was leaning down and she feared it would break, so we both sat back down. Then...we ran out of gas. I asked the guy I rented the bike from about gas before we left. He opened the tank and shook the bike, I looked in and saw what I thought was plenty of gas. What I didn't notice, since I was on the bike's right side while I leaned over and he showed me the petcock positions, is that he left it on reserve. So we started to push, we were in the middle of nowhere. Soon a bicyclist came by, signaled a "A what's the problem gesture?" I signaled to the tank. He said something and pointed at an abandoned house. I didn't understand. Minutes later a teenage boy on a really beat up Chinese 125 motorcycle rode up. The two talked. The kid made the "Do you have money sign?" When I said, "yes" he pointed to his back seat. I got on with no helmet (he had no helmet or shirt) since I hoped we were just going to his house. Instead he got onto another dirt road with lots of rocks and two wet water crossings and we went for quite a while passing a road full of kids walking home from school. They seemed very entertained by this old white guy riding on the back of this kid's bike. We finally hit a paved road going another direction and along the way a military vehicle honked and forced us off the road. There was a bit of a shoulder and I was longing for my gear but he did fine, and we hit the gas station. After filling an empty oil jug and topping off his tank we headed back.

When we got back to where I left my wife, gear and bike all three were gone. The guy on the bicycle had pushed my rental bike to his small concrete home that he shared with a rather large family and they had allowed my wife to sit in the shade.



Zanzibar Rain



Out of gas

Using their machete they had hacked off the top of a coconut and let her sip coconut milk and showed her how to use their well. After filling up, the locals noticed fuel was leaking from the hose at the bottom of the float bowl. The hose was old and damaged but we got it on, even though I felt certain it wouldn't stay that way. It's interesting, leaving my wife on the side of the road allowed her to meet the family, see how they live in Zanzibar and have a fresh coconut -this was my wife's favorite adventure of the whole day.

From there we pushed on trying to find the Indian Ocean coastline. Still not sure where exactly we were, we hit a main road and saw a sign for the beach. Ten minutes later, we came to the end of the road and it turned out to be a small private resort. After getting back to the intersection we gambled and turned right eventually hitting their National Park and monkey reserve. We talked to a policeman there that gave us directions so we continued on. Finally we hit the coastal road. Not sure where to stop for a late lunch and limited views of the beach we headed further South for a while. Along the way we were stopped at a police checkpoint and with all our paperwork in order we continued on. Eventually we saw a sign leading down a rough road to a hotel/pool & restaurant. It was a good choice. Lunch was great, we talked to several couples from around the world, we walked out to the beach with its turquoise water and I regretted not having my swimming suit.

From there we headed back, hoping to do a better job of navigating. We were given several suggestions, two of which were written on a napkin. I got us finally to the road I thought was the final leg into town. It wasn't familiar but we were following the setting sun so the direction was right. As

traffic picked up I felt confident we were entering the city. Then the pavement stopped and we rode on a rough road under construction for 20 minutes before officially entering town and hitting a paved road. Now to find the bike rental location. I was determined to try by using the setting sun as a reference. We rode all around in downtown traffic and finally had to ask. Twenty minutes later we were there, turned in the bike and walked to the hotel. Honestly, it was quite a sense of accomplishment and relief. Roads were average to poor, signs were nonexistent vehicles and buses honked and rushed by, scooters whizzed by us on either side while pedestrians and animals were constant objects to dodge not to mention they drive on the left side of the road. But country 41 on a motorcycle was now on the books.

That evening we headed to the city park by the water just missing out on seeing the sunset. Every evening local vendors and about 150 chefs set up about 50 booths to cook for all the tourists. The food is good and inexpensive with the usual hawkers trying to get you to eat from their particular booth. Zanzibar was interesting mostly due to the mix of cultures and international tourists. The local are a mix of Arabs (this was formerly the Capitol of Oman) and Africans with a small contingent of Europeans left from the colonial days. The Island of Zanzibar is predominately Muslim which is a contrast to its mainland mother country, Tanzania.

The next morning we flew to Nairobi, Kenya and ditched our motorcycle gear bags for two small light weight bags and headed to a regional airport to catch a puddle jumper to the Masai Mara National Reserve which butts into the Sarengetti National Park in Tanzania to see the famous wildebeest migration. The flight in was a great way to see the area and animals from an aerial perspective. After landing we saw an impressive collection of animals just driving to the camp. After checking in, we went out again and saw a lion with his two tigers and cubs, a family of eleven as well as bobcats, giraffes, elephants, wart hogs wildebeests, etc. etc. We stayed in a small camp and specifically in a fancy tent for two with wild life grazing just in front of our tent sitting area. The tent had a shower, toilet, sink, and a double bed. The lights are dual powered. When the generator is on you have electrical lights and solar charge kicks in when it's off. All meals are included but drinks, served while sitting around the fire, were extra. At night it got pretty chilly so it was a nice treat to crawl in and find two hot water bottles under the covers -what a great idea.

The next morning, we were off shortly after 6:00 a.m. and headed to river to see the world's most famous migration, the wildebeest migration. It was a spectacular sight, with crocodiles snacking on as many wildebeest as they could catch during the short, panicky crossing which included zebras as well the wildebeest. Then it was off to another crossing. There are 1.5 to 3 million wildebeest in a constant migration following the rain and green grasslands. This was a great experience and very relaxing. But after two full days we were ready for the next adventure.

We had a 2:00 am wake up for a very early flight from Nairobi to Istanbul. We arrived in Istanbul and headed to the hotel in this amazing, historic and culturally diverse city. We waited for the motorcycle to be delivered, a BMW F800GS. We had ridden one of these previously through several



Wildebeest



Safari Tent

countries in Africa both on and off the pavement and liked the comfort and agility, preferring it to its larger brother.

The condition of the bike though was disappointing. It was dirty, the front tire was low on air, the tool box and manual was missing, the left mirror was stripped and spun loosely, torn seat, and broken blinker lens. There was no GPS as promised, so they went and bought an automotive style devise and holder which popped out on the cobblestone street within a block of the hotel and with no way to keep it charged it was dead shortly after we left town. The good thing was it got us out of town (using my hand to ensure it didn't fall out on rough sections instead of keeping both hands on the bars.) The company that rented the bike is www.motoroads.com so you know who to avoid. At the first gas station out of town I bought some clear 2" tape, grabbed a large zip lock bag, bought a map and made my own map pouch since with no GPS or tank bag, I was on my own.

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Mapping

Crossing the huge bridge into Istanbul from Europe to Asia was a treat for my wife. My eyes were glued to the road, still with one hand on the GPS. As we headed east I was surprised by the tall tree covered mountains along the road to Ankara which is the capitol of Turkey. These turned into rolling hills as we continued but as we got closer to the capitol, the landscape became more desert like. As we headed through Ankara I was struck by the fact that everything seemed new, new high rises, new apartment buildings, and new construction. At this point we were now off the toll road finally and continued to head south. The roads were great, 4 lanes of fresh pavement and no police shooting radar despite the warning signs.

After a long ride with 11 hours in the saddle we pulled into The Cappadocia National Park and world heritage site and certainly one of the highlights of the trip. Here people took advantage of the soft stone to build homes and churches into a fascinating troglodyte-style architecture. Most of the hotels and homes are built to resemble the existing lunarscape panoramas.

The next morning we woke up at 4:00 a.m. to catch a shuttle from the hotel for our sunrise balloon ride over the area. It was our first balloon experience. We floated just over ground level for parts of the trip and as high as 1200 meters at other times. This unique landscape needs to be seen from the air. There were 40 balloons in the air all at once which I thought was amazing. Apparently with tourism down, that's low. They say that during the high season it can be up to 100 at one time. This culminated with landing perfectly on the back of the trailer followed by pastries and champagne.

With all the refugees pouring into Syria further to the east, several bombings including the airport and the recent attempted coup, tourism is down, way down in Turkey. Restaurant hawkers are more aggressive, and hotels are slashing rates. Another noticeable sight is all the new Turkish flags flown everywhere. It makes you wonder with the countries crack down on the military, teachers, and anyone suspected to be part of the coup, are all the new flags a renewed sense of national pride or self-preservation. Probably



Cappadocia

some degree of both. However it's not a conversation you would have at that time with a local.

The following day we were back on the bike heading to Konya for lunch which is the home of the famous whirling dervishes and a place where Muslims go for pilgrimage. Then it was on to the Mediterranean Sea and the coastal town of Antalya which is the largest Turkish city on the Western coast with the wonderfully preserved old city district of Kaleici, an old Roman-era harbor. The terrain along the way that day changed from farm land to desert and then surprisingly into an amazing mountain range. The roads were smooth and twisty. This went on for over 100 miles and was one of the few times we saw any other full size motorcycles, maybe three. The road was frequented with small family operated fruit vendors also selling sweet corn being cooked in pots. The drivers were aggressive, passing up hill in no passing zones headed straight for me. One driver never backed off even after I flashed my lights. He forced me to the shoulder. Once we hit the coast, I expected a small two lane scenic path but instead it was 4 lanes of a heavily trafficked road about a mile from the water. It was this stretch that tried my patience to say it nicely. With so few full size motorcycles to bother with noticing, other vehicles seemed to just move right into our space. No signal, no acknowledgement of my presence at all. As I observe the Turkish drivers, it seemed no one used their mirrors or signals. Lane markings are for reference only and when drivers do change lanes, it's a gradual process. They move two wheels over the line, pause and then not abruptly but over the length of a city block glide slowly into the next lane.

Once we hit Antalya, I turned on the car type GPS they had reluctantly provided. Of course it had no sun shield so I had a lot of problems seeing the screen. I would pull over under the shade of a bridge to anticipate the next few miles. I put my reading glasses on and put them low on my nose to see the road and try to see the screen. We got into construction and since the screen is in Turkish I didn't recognize the "recalculate" option. Eventually, I decided to go south to the water's edge and try my luck the old fashioned way, by feel. At that point the fully charged GPS that I only turned on at the edge of town was now down to one bar and was saying to recharge soon. We pulled over and plugged it in to a portable charging device and taped it to the windshield.

A local motorcyclist in his car pulled over and showed us a picture of his Triumph Tiger and told us to follow him to the area of the hotel. My wife tends to favor old historical districts with walking streets in lieu of nice seaside hotels. Once he guided us to the old district, he couldn't drive any further on the pedestrian only paths so he called the hotel. A guy from the hotel met us on his bicycle and we followed him down the narrow pedestrian streets lined with bars and restaurants to the hotel. We would NEVER have found it on our own. At that point I needed an adult beverage or two. Once my nerves we calmed, we went for a walk through the old town and found a nice seafood eatery next to the local harbor with some amazing grilled squid and calamari.

Finding the route out of the old city was like a navigating a maze, but it went well. Getting out of the city with the help of the GPS wasn't too bad. There was more construction to deal with but most people were at work and the sun was still coming up so I could see the GPS screen.

Once out of town, we were back in the mountains and once again, they were spectacular. I never knew Turkey had such great roads and so many mountain ranges. We stopped at the small seaside town of Goerck for lunch on the water, then began the final push to the seaside city of Bodrum. The place was great. There is a huge castle built by the Saint John Knights in the 15th century in the middle of two small inlets that make up the harbor. It's definitely a tourist hub with a string of resort/spas coming into town. We stayed across the street from the sea where there is one bar/ restaurant after another, both on the beachside and across the street.



Turkish Coast

At night, walking the corniche, we were once again amongst a sea of eateries, tourist shops and gelato stands. We were amazed by the number of tourists since this was September when most people are back in school or at work. Apparently this was not the case in Bodrum.

Then it was off to Izmir, a short 240 KM's which still took 4 hours and unfortunately was one of the last stops near the end of the trip. Izmir is one of the largest cities in Turkey and is right on the water with a long beautiful boardwalk. After riding in Turkey a while, I learned that in traffic, you stay dead center in your lane. If you move to the edge to see what



Ferry

is up ahead drivers will move onto the lane right next to you. This is not done with any ill intent, just because there is space. Most motorcyclists without saddle bags split traffic anyway.

This brings us to the final day. It was going to be a long ride and quite warm. At this point I wanted to slow it down and ensure we made the final leg safely. We met another motorcyclist along the way that suggested we take a ferry which would save us 160 KMs of heavy truck traffic. It was a nice break and we met another motorcyclist on the ferry who pointed out that we could have rented a brand new F800GS from the local BMW dealer for about the same price as well as other BMW models. I had looked at their website before we selected a rental location but the site was only in Turkish and I didn't see any rental options. Lesson learned. Once off the ferry and headed toward Istanbul it was solid traffic, Turkish style, for as long as you could see and it went on and on. Motorcyclists were on both shoulders and moving quickly. One even signaled to me to get out of the traffic and join them. We did for a bit but with saddlebags on the bike I was limited and the priority was getting my wife and the bike back unscathed, not to mention neither of us had travel insurance. We finally made it to the hotel as the last of the GPS juice ran out. We made it. Mission achieved!



Istanbul