

WORDS &amp; IMAGES: MANAS DEWAN

# A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

She is a philosophy teacher. He is a corporate professional. They put a pause to their prolific careers and set out on an epic motorbike ride across 18 countries, over 20,000 kilometres and 100 days. Here's what they learnt...

## DOSTI ON WHEELS

**H**ere I am. Back home in Pune. It has been a few months since Anu (my wife) and I returned from our trip of wonder and discovery. And there are still mornings I wake up confused - where am I? Which part of the world is this exactly? And then realisation dawns as the all so-familiar sights of my very own bedroom drift into my consciousness. It brings with it muted sounds of the world around. I wake up to another day - at home.

I was your regular corporate guy, working a regular job, playing hide and seek with bosses and colleagues and working towards the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I must admit, I achieved a fair share of success too. Anu and I would go off on annual vacations and take a few days to get away from the rat-race. And then upon return, dive headlong into the game of life again, trying to keep ahead of the pack.

But there were dreams we harboured. Dreams of distant horizons. Dreams of exploring this big bright beautiful world, of experiencing nature in the raw and of bonding with fellow humans across the planet. But we pushed this dream aside, because reality spoke a different language and was not very tolerant such dreamers.



Nothing better than spending time with a bunch of like-minded riders



# Well begun

Then we ushered in the year 2017: I completed 20 years of working life. What did I have to show for it? Endless hours and late nights did not count. A few good friends collated over the years however did. A modest bank balance certainly helped... but what rankled was that for both Anu and I, our dream was still far from being realised.

"Are we going to die one day, and think that we never even made any serious attempt at realising our dreams?" I asked... and Anu replied "Life throws a golden cage at you. Stay in it long enough and you will think this is the only reality. Our dreams may soon remain as fantasy". We were in Oman, we had a villa on the beach and life was good. But what about our dreams? That evening we made up our minds. We would put a pause to life as we were living it and chase our dream. I ended my assignment in Oman, returned to India, purchased a motorbike and shipped it to Valencia.

We were going riding! Our plan was to see the world on our motorbike. Initially we wanted to travel from Europe to India but settled for a ride till Turkey. Beyond that were very volatile regions and it was best we live to ride another day. Thus the plan shaped up – a ride on our India registered Ducati Scrambler. A ride across 18 countries and 20,000 kilometres, four months of travelling the open road! Soon it was June and we were at Valencia, our India-registered Ducati Scrambler was



Croatia is a small country with beautiful landscapes

waiting at the Valencia port... it was our time to live the dream!

## Rocky start

If you head out looking for adventure, my sincere request: don't ask anyone for advice. But for sure, ask for assistance and information, and know this for sure: it is the friends you make along the way that will really get you through.

At Valencia, our motorbike, the Ducati Scrambler earned us the friendship of the Ducati Spain team. Right from day one, Dawinder Wahla, Daniel Ricos and Juan Aliaga adopted us into their family, introducing us to their favourite places, familiarising us with the land and culture and making sure that Valencia felt as much home to us as Pune, surrounded as we were by friends. The initial paperwork and motorbike clearance was a hard task but

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these guys proved their golden hearts. "Do not worry Manas, in the worst case, we will gift you a brand new Ducati to complete your ride," said Daniel one evening, adding "Your mission is our mission too... we are family".

As I look back, the story of our ride is the story of such kindred spirits, strangers who walked into our lives to offer us help, hope and encouragement. That was our first important lesson: Angels walk this earth – not all of them sport wings. And along the open road, we were blessed by many, many such angels.

Having a Ducati motorcycle got us citizenship into the world of the Ducatistas. And everywhere we went, they gathered around us. Across our route, from Valencia to the Vatican, from Prague to Portugal and from Thessaloniki to Turkey, the Ducati family welcomed us, over luncheons, breakfast rides and evening receptions hosted in our honour. We were their centrepiece and through our experiences they too lived our dream.

And we bonded over long rides, sometimes using sign language and over long evenings and glorious sunsets. When we visited Bologna, the Ducati homeland in Italy, the Ducati Scrambler team



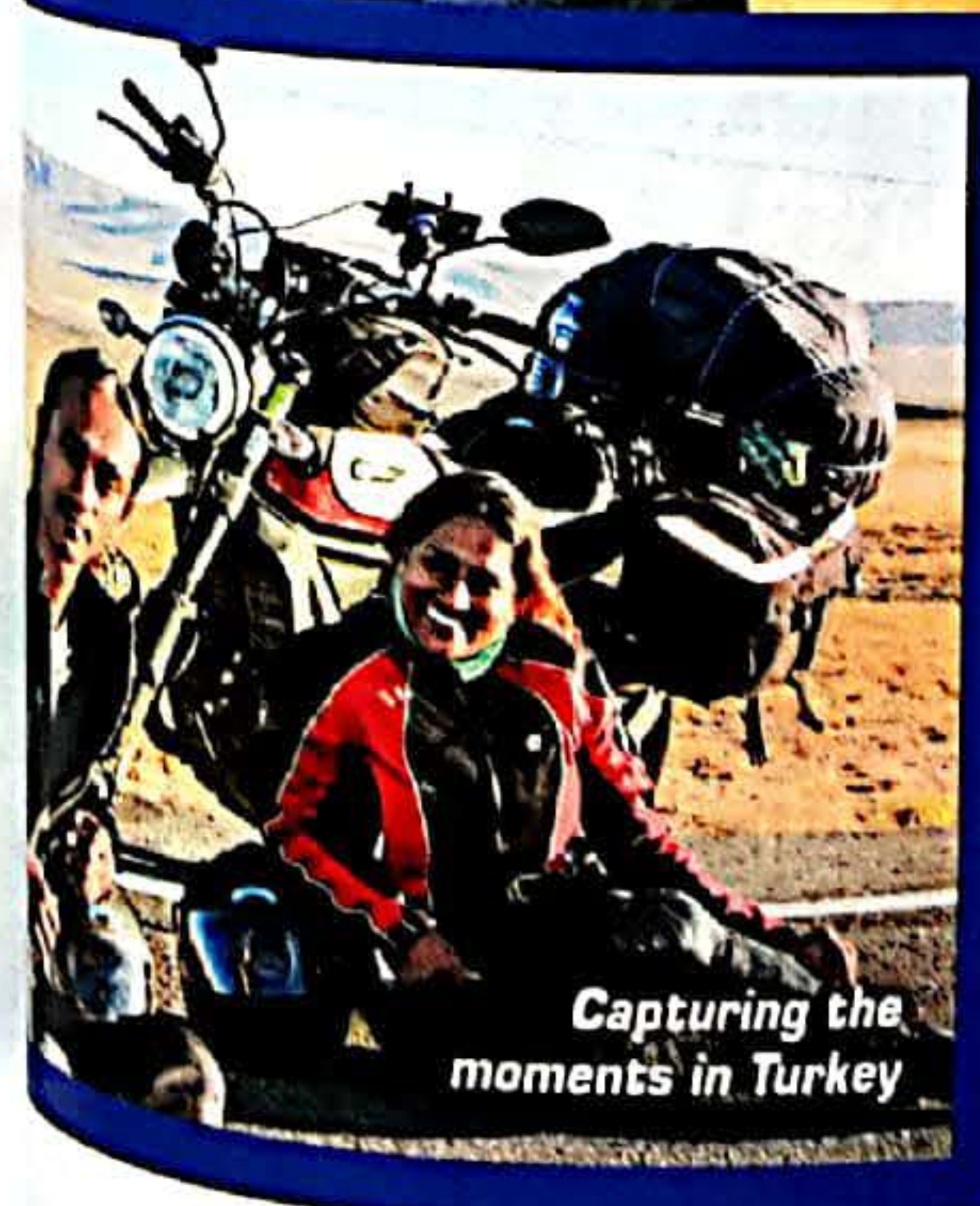
Wandering around the local market in Turkey



'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', we said, they believed



Newly developed allies at Ducati Liechtenstein



Capturing the moments in Turkey

descended upon us. And connecting us all with the Ducati family was the soft spoken Italian lady, Eugenia Simoni. It was she who orchestrated the Ducati clubs, keeping them updated of our movement and ensuring that companionship and assistance was only a call away, everywhere we travelled.

## Stepping stones

The ride was the biggest adventure of our lives. And it was no mean task either. Hours at border crossings, paperwork issues and delays were a part of the story. The harder part was in dealing with our motorbike getting vandalised (and nearly stolen) in Rome and a serious mechanical breakdown on the border of Turkey, 350 kilometres away from any help. But what is a good ride story without a few hard moments... we lived through it all and as I look back, what shines through again is the kindness, humanity and help from complete strangers who took it upon themselves to smoothen our road.

The summer of 2017 was the hottest for Europe in the past several years: we motorbiked in a heat wave of 50-degree plus across parts of Spain and also in the Balkans... while in the remote mountains

of Perigord, we rode in wet, cold and near freezing temperatures. At Portugal we braved forest fires and deep within the jungles of Czech upon a no-moon night, we got hopelessly lost with a malfunctioning GPS. We witnessed the ravages of war deep within Bosnia and travelled past heavily militarised zones of eastern Turkey. But through it all, it was our faith in goodness and humanity that

## FACTFILE

Using their own resources, Manas and Dr. Anuradha Dewan travelled on their Ducati Scrambler Motorbike across 18 countries and 20,000 kilometres over 4 months, a project they called "Dosti On Wheels."

Their motorbike ride started from the port city of Valencia in Spain. They rode to Portugal, France and thereafter covered Switzerland, Germany, Czech, Austria, and Liechtenstein before riding into Italy and the Vatican. From there it was the Eastern European countries of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia until finally they rode into Greece. They then entered Asia and spent a month exploring the beautiful land of Turkey. They shipped their bike back from the port city of Istanbul into Mumbai to conclude their odyssey.



Street wandering in Greece



THE FIRST STEP IS THE HARDEST, BUT WE HAVE TO TAKE THE PLUNGE, ELSE DREAMS REMAIN FANTASIES

gave us the courage, just like the help from angels along the road that in turn gave us the trust and confidence.

We lived with the locals in homestays and each evening as we spent time with our hosts as they opened their homes, hearts and lives to us. Through the experiences of these hundreds who shared their life and worldviews with us, we have been enriched beyond measure.

#### Lessons from the road

As I look back upon the past months of wanderlusting across alien lands, it is not just the beauty of pristine panorama nor the hum of the moving engine that makes the heart flutter. The most special moments are ones where I experienced perfect unison – sometimes with the road, sometimes along some ancient shore and sometimes over candlelight... in company or in quiet reflection. Those were moments when life spoke to me. And what did it whisper?

Having travelled alone through the remote countryside and smallest hamlets, I know this for sure: it is a big wide world but not a bad one. Kindness and humanity abounds all around us and all it takes is for us to step out of the four walls of our home or office to experience these daily miracles.

During this trip I have realised the true value of friendship. It is really the most precious gift we can ever receive or give. We experienced some of our deepest moments of despair and in such troubled times, it was not our material possessions but the support of near and dear ones that gave us hope to carry on.

And as I look back, I realise more than ever that if we truly strive to chase our dreams, we cannot achieve it by continuing with life as-is... we have to step out of the comfort of the safe harbour. The first step is often the hardest, but we have to cut the anchor and take the plunge, else dreams remain as empty fantasies, forever.

Slovenia is too beautiful a place to not fall in love with

What a wonderful companion the Scrambler has been throughout the ride



With the Ducati Scrambler team in Bologna



Holding the tri-colour gives you a different high

Smiling faces after the ride was accomplished



RE THUNDERBIRD X 500 | TVS APACHE RTR 160 4V  
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## SX APPEAL

KAWASAKI'S SUPERCHARGED SENSATION

