



DOERS: ANU AND MANAS DEWAN

# European summer

Our new series of Doers features focusses on people who went out and did what you think is hard or impossible. Anu and Manas took a Ducati Scrambler for a 100-day dream trip of Europe. Here's what they did. And how you could do it too.

TEXT SHUBHABRATA MARMAR  
PHOTOS MANAS DEWAN, ANURADHA DEWAN  
AND ANSHAY ADHAN







#### WHO?

Manas was chief of marketing for a very large corporate group in Oman.

Anuradha, his wife, is a philosophy teacher, life coach, corporate trainer and a self-confessed wanderer. They decided to make an experiment with [their] lives and go on a motorcycle trip.

#### WHERE? EUROPE!

Anu and Manas chose Europe because it fit many criteria for them — almost no visa paperwork.

#### WHY EUROPE?

ANU: Europe offers such diversity. That's fascinating for us. Europe is also very dear to us. We have had multiple experiences of travel here. This land is warm, welcoming, food is great and there is no monotony.



**M**anas Dewan used to work for an automotive manufacturer in India — that's how we know him. Then suddenly, we heard of Dosti On Wheels, a brand his wife Anu and he created as a tag for their dream ride to Europe. Here's how they did it. Here's how you could also do it.

#### ? The idea?

**Manas Dewan:** I remember adventurers on journeys in fairy tales I read as a youngster. Sometimes you grow up but your fairy tales do not leave you. And then Anu said, "Yeah, that's in my head as well. We should start travelling!"

#### ? Then what happens?

**MD:** It stays with your while and then it refuses to be pushed down after a while. Then it explodes. You realise that you have a finite life. And dreams come with an expiry period. If you don't act within that, they become a fantasy.

**Anu Dewan:** I asked if we were serious about this then what were we waiting for? Life was wonderful in Oman. But could this be a golden cage?



know that this [see box] is all you will require. But ultimately we figured out that these six are all you need.

**AD:** We had our first delay — two weeks. We thought we wouldn't be able to ride at all.

**MD:** The Carnet is valid only in some countries — only some 30 countries honour it. Spain isn't one of those. So they told us to take the bike to Italy. We [Spain] will treat it as a used import. I spent two sleepless nights just reading the importation document of Spain... We found the solution. It said that if a tourist is bringing his own vehicle, he can write a self-declaration and for six months, the vehicle will be allowed to be in the country without registration or paying taxes. That's how we spoke to CHA and asked him to get the bike out.

**AD:** But the trip is also about the support we had. The Ducati dealer in Valencia was at it for no interest of his own to ensure our ride happened. He offered us a brand-new Scrambler or any vehicle we wanted — come back and return the bike to us. Thankfully we didn't have to resort to this.

**MD:** Sometimes you have to believe that there are angels watching you.

#### ? How do you pack the bike?

**AD:** We prioritised the important things. So papers, parts and spares. And a small toolkit. We carried out medicine and first aid kit. You need summer, winter and rain wear because of European weather. Then gadgets. Laptop and gadgets, GoPro, camera and attachments. Three mobiles. One as a GPS with offline maps — we used Here Maps. Second for communications with local SIM cards. And of course, a power bank. Then clothes, very few. We got shoes halfway between mine and Manas' sizes and shared.

#### ? How did you plan this?

**MD:** We planned this in three steps. Our initial plan to ride into India fell apart — too many volatile regions along the way. So our first loose plan ended in Turkey with timelines decided by the visa and it's geographical coverage. We prioritised any countries that were important to us so we could get border visas. And Turkey only needed a 48 hour process for online visas, so we didn't have to decide on that immediately.

So first, loose route plans, second, exit points in case of trouble — Italy, then Greece and last of all, Turkey. Then comes

**MD:** The first step is the hardest. The moment when you have to act. Then you turn off the rationality and go with the flow. That's the moment when you cut the anchor. Without that you cannot realise your dream. The moment we cut our anchor, our trip was a success. A small part whispers if you're doing the right thing? To give up everything for a 100 day joyride? You tell you heart, "You should have asked me this earlier, my friend. Now I have decided, now I will do this. So in the morning, excitement but no nervousness."

#### ? What's next?

**AD:** Manas resigned and we started looking for packers and movers. We parked our container without a ship-to destination — to be decided in six months.

**MD:** We reached India at the end of March and by April, we had acquired our Ducati Scrambler. It took us a month to complete the modifications and paperwork and by end-April, the bike was on the ship. May-end, it was in Valencia and June 1 so were we.

#### ? Scrambler? Why?

**AD:** We're not tall. I wanted a bike where I'd reach the ground easily. Had we been half a foot taller, we might have opted for a Multistrada. We liked the idea of a Ducati because their network in Europe is dense.

**MD:** It reduced our need to carry spares. Also, any bike can do this. A 50cc scooter could do it. We just needed something with space for us and to hold sustained high speeds.

#### ? Paperwork?

**MD:** We struggled and there were lots of delays. Even the guys in the business do not

the exact plan. After research we decided to not freeze the route until we get there. The best routes aren't on the internet. Our route shaped up by people we met. Like Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro were totally not in our plan. But someone said if you're already here and have seen Bulgaria already why don't you go there? No one does. Bosnia. Dangerous! But someone said it's beautiful.

**AD:** The more people told us it was dangerous the more we felt like we had to go and see for ourselves.

#### ? You guys risk takers?

**AD:** We are adventurers. We know what we are doing. Not foolhardy.

**MD:** I'd go back to my cut the anchor analogy. I would never do that I wasn't confident I'd reach the shore. As a professional, I know three steps ahead what I would be doing.

#### ? Trip parameters?

**AD:** We had to be within our 90 day visa — although we could have exited and returned for another 90 days. We knew that we were moving towards Asia. And we had figured out the countries we wanted to visit.

**MD:** The way we wanted to do our trip was to not get into bigger towns and cities. To get to feel the pulse of the place and live with the people.

#### ? Unknown towns?

**MD:** We only stayed on Airbnb places. We would find these hosts one or two days in advance. We would write to them. Anu's good at that because she's very intuitive. Based on the responses, we would know who was the right person to stay with.

**AD:** We picked traditional





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### HOW TO EXPORT THE BIKE?

**Manas:** After much research and trials, we learnt that you ultimately need just six documents. From India, you need five. Registration - ideally your own - and insurance, your driving licence and based on that your International Driving Permit. And you need a passport for your motorcycle, the Carnet du Passage which permits you to enter and exit countries without having to register the motorcycle in those countries. We got ours from the Western India Automobile Association, one of two bodies in India that do carnets. The sixth document is local insurance in the country you're headed to. This is easy to buy at overland border crossings because it is a common demand and supply exists. Buying this at a port can be complex because it's not always available and sometimes a border post will ask to see the bike before issuing insurance. In our case, much research led us to a small government office that issues this insurance at Valencia, Spain, where our bike was shipped.

But before the local insurance issue crops up, you have to find a clearing house agent (CHA) with links to the equivalent at the destination port. They ensure the bike clears customs at both ends. Meanwhile, you have to crate or pack the bike for transit, identify a shipping line and line up the schedules so that the bike arrives in time for you.

If you negotiate well, this should cost Rs 70-90,000 each way including crating, shipping and CHA charges. And the process for re-importing the bike is the exactly the reverse.



### TOTAL COST?

**Manas:** ₹10 lakh towards the motorbike with all the parts and bits. ₹20 lakh towards the rest of the ride. It is possible to make the budget smaller or larger. Pre-booking will reduce costs. We didn't go into too many exotic experiences which could have increased the budget. But it's not a backpacker trip or camp even one night.

**Anu:** And we did socialise and spend. We chose to spend on things that were meaningful to us. Like heritage properties or old homes

homes. 6th, 7th, 12th Century homes. Where things haven't been changed in years. We've lived in places like that. We've shared our meals with absolutely wonderful people...

**MD:** We experienced world views of people who are dramatically different. You ride, you reach, you engage, you have dinner... you open up your world. And you see the worlds of people. Affluent. Middle class. The Poor. We even stayed with refugees. We understood what it feels like to be cut off from your homeland. It's as if you have lived that life based on the stories of those people, you know.

### ? Country recommendations for Indians?

**MD:** If you love Goa, you will love Portugal. Same spirit, multiplied 10 times. Czechia was great for us too. Those guys are different from the typical Europeans. The Russian/Slavic influence is huge. And the countryside is raw and beautiful. The third would be Croatia, which is just beautiful. It's paradise. Our favourite in terms of people - we were warned about the Turkish people - that they don't mean what they say. Our experience was the opposite. They were the warmest. You cannot leave a fuel station without a cup of the "tazeh chai" which they will make for you. And all around you will have friends.

**AD:** If you want to start with a comfort zone, you want to start with Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain. So like India! Eastern Europe is so wild and so beautiful. Bosnia, Albania, Montenegro. People love Indians there. We got a heroes welcome. People came from nearby villages to see if my colour was real. It was very very fascinating for them. Those lands are not much explored by

travellers. People are struggling.. You can see poverty. But its beautiful

### ? How does the trip end?

**MD:** We were staying at a central town called Safranbolu an old Ottoman town about 400km from Istanbul. We have never been that silent or slow on any trip. We have never taken that many breaks on any trip. We just didn't that journey to end. As we took off and we looked down at the country, the city, you realise that the names on the maps are no longer just names. They represent the homes of friends you have in those cities.

It tells you that there are three key elements. 1. Now is the perfect moment to do it. 2. Cut the anchor. I'm glad we did. 3. Hardship and adversity. We braved 55° heat, forest fires, we went through 5° in the rain the whole day. Finger tips were blue. We have raced through thunderstorms where you can feel your hair standing up. Sometimes we slept hungry... You realise that when you're on an adventure - just like in life - you will fall and you have to get up and take the next step. And you have to keep walking until you cross the next hurdle. Keep going at it until you crack it.

**AD:** I would also have a lot of learning and experiences. But here are the top three. 1. It's a big beautiful world, not a bad world. A stranger is just a friend you do not know. You have to extend your hand and say hey lets be friends. 2. Friendship is the best gift you can give or receive. It's thicker than blood sometimes. In friendship you share the love, warmth and respect. It goes into your being. 3. You don't need too much to be happy. Next time, we would take fewer things next time. It's up to you to be happy.