



Hi to all our family, friends and fellow-travellers,

Well, it is the one and a half year point in our tour and time to bomb you all with one of those not so personal, but best intended update newsletters.

In general, the last 6 months have been quite an emotion packed time with absolute highlight experiences; some of the most challenging cycling terrain and a number of lowest of the low moments as well. And although it is so much easier to say in hindsight: that's all part of being on the road.

For those of you who have been following our adventures, you'll know that India was one of the greatest disappointments in our trip so far. I suppose we entered with naïve hopes for a mix of magical exoticism and spiritualistic folk and wound up having one of the most stressful times in our lives. Sure the country is over populated and incredibly polluted and therefore chaos must be part of India's life equation. What we didn't expect, were day to day encounters with monetarily obsessed, ignorantly proud and aggressively pushy individuals, even though we spent 85% of our travelling time in non-touristy areas.

The battle to keep ourselves upright and alive on Indian roads also had its toll with both of our nervous systems and that didn't help matters either. Within a few weeks of cycling Ali had almost gone completely bonkers and was prepared to take the quickest route out. I, on the other hand, kept hanging on to hopes of a more enlightening India. In retrospect, I should have listened to him and got the dickens out when I had the chance, and consequently, after far too many stressful experiences on truck infested Rajasthani roads, I found myself laid up in Agra for more than two months, learning how to walk without a stick and exercising my way back onto the bike again. A sciatic nerve problem is frustrating enough but being stuck in a country you don't want to be in is quite another.

The biggest impact was our grand change of plans: the Indian tour to the south including visits to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were slashed from our itinerary and as soon as I was well enough, we found the quickest and shortest passage to Nepal.

In contrast, Nepal is fantastic and although there are some adverse effects of the transport trade and a few rather uninspiring consequences of poverty and tourism, in general, it is a relaxed place with incredibly friendly and hospitable people. Still a few idiotic bus drivers to contend with of course, but after only a few days on the road in the West Terai our passion for travelling by bike was fervently renewed.

Apart from meeting wonderful locals, we also bump into some pretty interesting characters travelling along the same paths as ourselves. Brad (Karimabad, Lahore and McLeod Ganj), Michael (Pokhara), Walter, Petra and Janez (campsite Islamabad), Jan Mulder (Agra) and occasionally they happen to be using the same mode of transport as well: Olivier, Miriam and Javier, Molly, Fumi, Julie and Ian, John, Judith and André, Odile and Olivier, Aitor, and just the other day Yusuke.

Molly joined us in Gilgit, Pakistan and cycled along to Islamabad, on what we would have to say was one of the biggest adventures we have been on yet. I'm sure that she thinks the same as well because the Karakoram Highway is not only an amazingly spontaneous stretch of road but it takes you from one extreme condition to the next. We left the KKH at Chilas where it was 55°C, to venture over the Babusar Pass and into the Kagan Valley. Within 24 hours, we found ourselves at 4200m, 5°C and with gradients of 26%. Pushing a loaded bike up a dirt track in these conditions is pretty damned challenging.

In light of current events though, I think the tourism industry in Pakistan is now at an all time low. But don't let that stop you from planning to visit the north of the country. The Hunza Valley is completely different to the perspective portrayed by adverse media coverage. In this area, we only met friendly, helpful and hospitable people and we felt completely safe for the length of our stay.

After Molly left Islamabad to continue with her travels in Turkey, we cycled on towards Lahore, where Ian and Julie joined us for a short but very enjoyable saunter across the border and into India. We are forever indebted to them for the delicious cups of filter coffee at dinner and breakfast in the rather poorly equipped restaurant at Wagah. They left us in Amritsar for a quick tour of India before heading into Nepal and further into SE Asia. We hope they are now settling down in New Zealand and lapping up the creature comforts of life there.

Just a few days short of one and a half years on the road, we arrived in Kathmandu. It also marks the end of our first cycling trail and with the cold winter air persistently lingering, the thought of a beach somewhere in South East Asia is looking more and more inviting everyday. The decision to fly to Kuala Lumpur on February 14 has been made and from here we will make our way to Bangkok over a two month period before flying out to Japan for a sakura spring. By the middle of June, we should be in China somewhere, but who can tell: you just never really know what is around the corner.

Thanks to all of you who read our updates and for the constant flow of mail and comments in our [questbook](#). Thanks to our families for their moral support and fixed address, which is required every now and again for logistical reasons. We would also like to let everyone out there know that it is always such a pleasant comfort to know that you are following our adventures. It goes without saying that we are looking forward to sharing our next leg of the journey with you too.

Cheers

Sonya and Aldrik

www.tour.tk – what a wonderful world tour

www.sonali.tk – justifiable web design