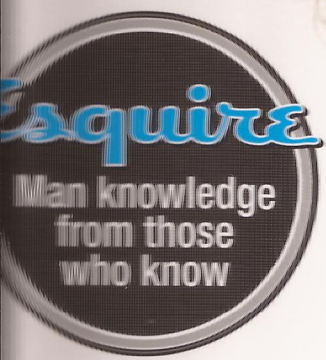


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GREAT RIDES
10 AMAZING
BIKE JOURNEYS



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RIDE TO LIVE

Former IT guru turned motorcycle adventurer and tour company owner Mike Ferris names his top 10 bike rides around the world.

Over the past decade, former IT executive Mike Ferris and his wife Denise (also a former executive) have journeyed more than half a million kilometres in search of the ultimate motorbike ride. They loved the search so much they started their own company, Ferris Wheels, to take other people on epic bike adventures. As part of our annual Travel Issue, we asked Ferris to nominate the 10 ultimate road trips he's undertaken over his many years of motorbiking, which he counts down in his own words over the following pages.



10



CAPPADOCIA, TURKEY

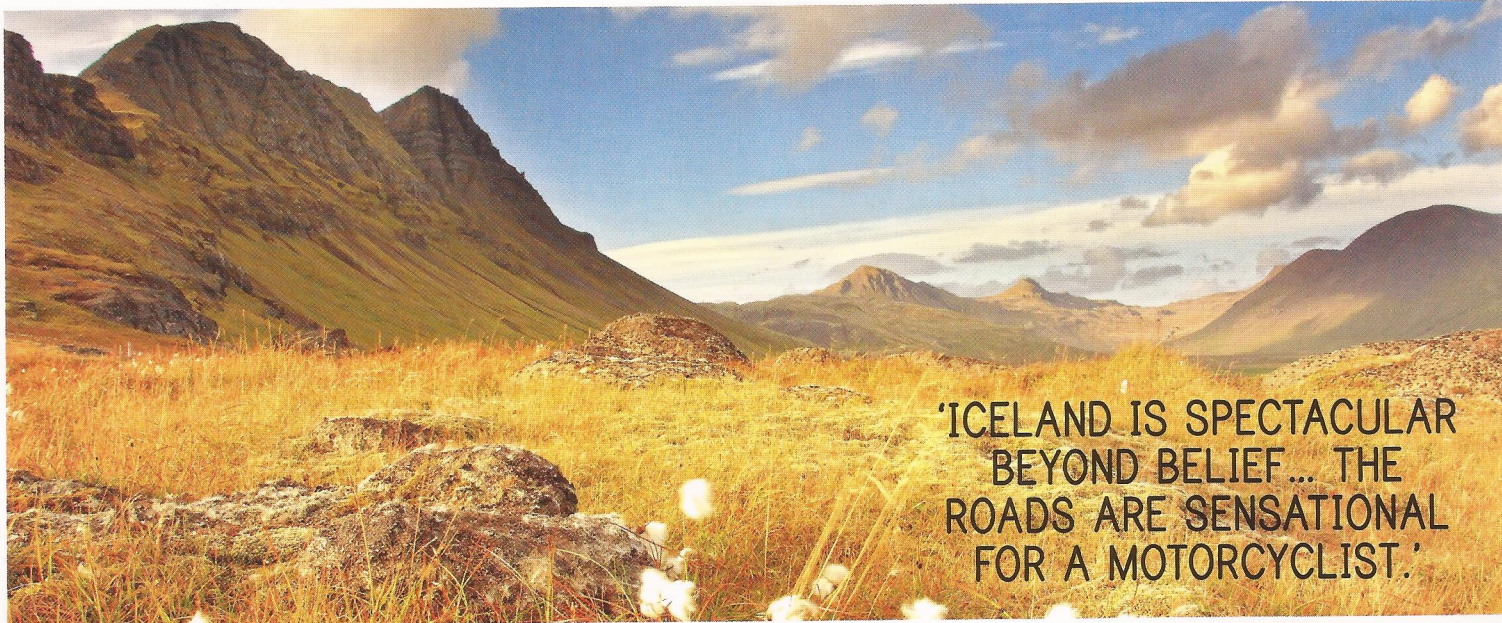
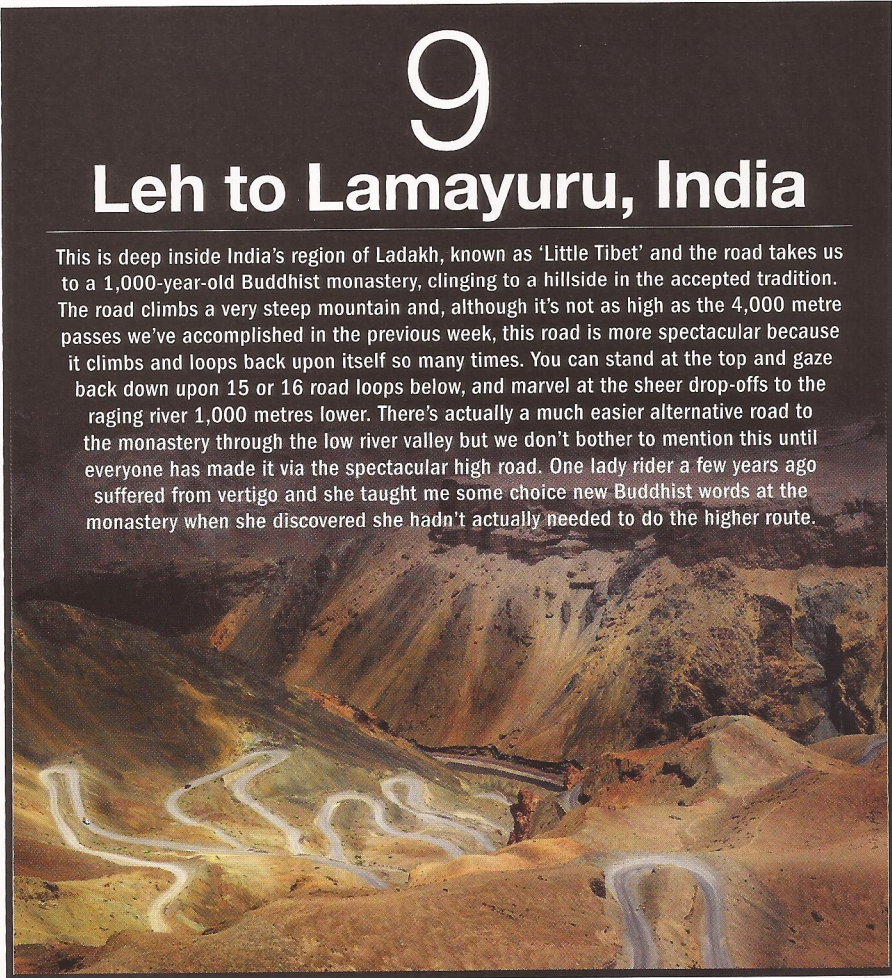
This is our longest day's ride on our tour of Turkey where, because of the wide open landscape, we can cover more than 500km. But it can be challenging because there are snow-capped mountains on the horizon blowing icy winds across the plateau.

On a recent ride I saw the sky turning purple and decided to stop the group for a cup of tea and hopefully miss the rain. Just as the last rider pulled into the cafe, the skies opened up with golf ball-sized hailstones – even the locals were stunned at the ferocity of the storm. And then it was all over in 10 minutes and we continued on in brilliant sunshine.

9

Leh to Lamayuru, India

This is deep inside India's region of Ladakh, known as 'Little Tibet' and the road takes us to a 1,000-year-old Buddhist monastery, clinging to a hillside in the accepted tradition. The road climbs a very steep mountain and, although it's not as high as the 4,000 metre passes we've accomplished in the previous week, this road is more spectacular because it climbs and loops back upon itself so many times. You can stand at the top and gaze back down upon 15 or 16 road loops below, and marvel at the sheer drop-offs to the raging river 1,000 metres lower. There's actually a much easier alternative road to the monastery through the low river valley but we don't bother to mention this until everyone has made it via the spectacular high road. One lady rider a few years ago suffered from vertigo and she taught me some choice new Buddhist words at the monastery when she discovered she hadn't actually needed to do the higher route.



'ICELAND IS SPECTACULAR BEYOND BELIEF... THE ROADS ARE SENSATIONAL FOR A MOTORCYCLIST.'

8 WESTERN FJORDS, ICELAND

If you ever get the chance to travel around Iceland, with or without a motorcycle, just do it. It's rugged and spectacular beyond belief. Take all the volcanoes of the Andes, the glaciers of

Patagonia, the thermal geysers of Yellowstone, the fjords of Norway, the lakes of Finland and add in more waterfalls than you can count. Throw it all on a rock in the Atlantic Ocean and take away all the people, and you've got Iceland. There's better lamb than New Zealand and better seafood than Tasmania.

In the remote Western Fjords, the nesting

grounds of gorgeous puffins are so tame they peck at your iPhone as you take close-ups. It's called Iceland for a reason, however, and you'll need lots of warm gear. I spend much of my year riding in the Himalayas, the Rockies and the Andes, and I've been colder in Iceland in the height of summer. But it's definitely worth it and, for a motorcyclist, the roads are sensational!

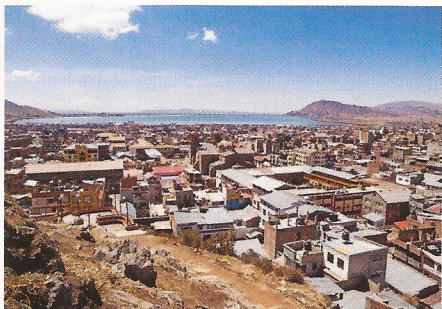
7



THRUMSHING LA, BHUTAN

The Land of the Thunder Dragon is the last Shangri-La. Sandwiched between overcrowded India and China, this Himalayan kingdom has a population of less than a million. There isn't a single set of traffic lights in the whole country.

The highest mountain pass of Thrumshing is a little less than 4,000 metres in altitude and is in the remote east of the country with little traffic. Shady corners out of the sun can hide treacherous black ice and we've had a few riders down from time to time, but usually at low speed. A few years ago I parked my bike to help a couple of people get their bikes upright again after dropping on the ice. As they rode away I returned to my bike to find a reputedly-timid golden langur monkey sitting on it.



6 MOQUEGUA, PERU TO COPACABANA, BOLIVIA

Many riders have discovered the joys of the Cusco to Nazca trans-Andes crossing in Peru, but not many have yet enjoyed the brilliant new highway across the south of the country. It's only been tarmacked for a couple of years and there are huge open sweeping corners where you can see for miles while cranked over in a high gear, traversing the Andes at over 4,000 metres.

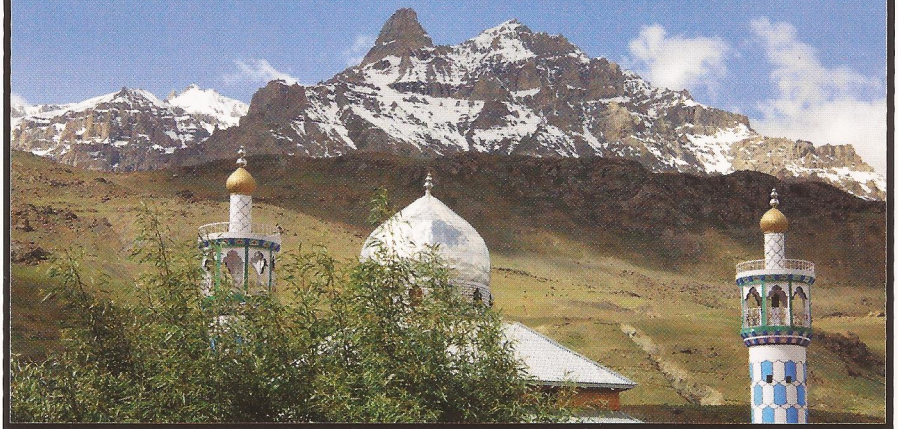
This road does come with its own unique perils. Just last year one of our riders went through a corner rather enthusiastically and had a close encounter of the alpaca kind. Attractive and fluffy-looking they may be, but they make a hell of a mess when collected at 100km/h.

5

Zoji La, Kashmir

Travelling west from a Himalayan settlement called Drass, apparently the second-coldest permanent town on the planet (behind Hobart, perhaps?), a highway snakes its way through raging river valleys. Impressive barren peaks rise all around, semi-arid pastures support only the toughest of sheep and goats and ponies. The road climbs to a craggy mountain pass, turns a sharp corner and suddenly the world is green again. This is the threshold marking the entry to the Kashmir Valley, sometimes called the 'Switzerland of India'.

We endured a particularly arduous crossing one year, with torrential rain causing landslips and mudslides. A couple of guys had dropped their bikes, mechanical problems had caused delays, the military check-posts had been less than efficient, and we arrived at our hotel well after dark. As we finally dragged ourselves into the lobby, the manager turned on the stereo in a welcoming gesture, and the music which blared through the speakers was the soundtrack to the latest blockbuster, *Mission: Impossible*.



4

DADES AND TODRA GORGES, MOROCCO

Within a short distance of each other in Morocco are two rivers called the Dades and the Todra. They've each carved deep gorges in the naked landscape, different yet similar. Mankind's tradition has been to use such natural channels for access and transport, so roads have been built through these gorges. They are absolutely spectacular examples of engineering and a sheer delight to ride.

The Dades Gorge has been used in photographic advertising for Moto Guzzi in recent years, which has resulted in greater exposure as a destination for dedicated two-wheeled adventure seekers.





3 Dolomites, northern Italy

A longtime favourite with European riders, the mountains of northern Italy attract bikers by the hordes. Weekend Warriors with big fat sticky tyres try to carve 'a fast lap' through the region and sometimes the biggest threat to a motorcyclist is another motorcyclist, with scant regard for road rules or biker protocol. But the breathtaking scenery of the Alps and the marvellous road engineering is a combination too alluring to resist, and the biggest magnet of all is the famous Stelvio Pass, an impossible series of loops climbing high in the Dolomites between Italy and Austria. I've done this pass on one of my favourite bikes, the Suzuki V-Strom, and can testify to the euphoric feeling it brings to be nailing corner after corner.

2 BLACK SEA COASTLINE, TURKEY

Surely one of the world's best-kept secrets, the northern coast of Turkey is dotted with little fishing villages and hamlets. There is a 300km stretch of road between Sinop and Amasra which hugs the coastline for much of the way, with the beautiful Black Sea on one side and the most amazing forests on the other. Every green imaginable is represented, and on a warm day woody perfumes waft on the breeze. The Black Sea isn't black by the way; it is a gorgeous deep blue and the coast road climbs high above it in some places, affording a stunning panoramic view. In springtime there are abundant wildflowers everywhere.


The friendliness of the Turkish people is legendary, particularly towards Australians. I think it's a legacy of Gallipoli, where we fought each other in someone else's war and developed a mutual respect. I was leading a group several years ago and it was a chilly wet day when I stopped for the traditional cup of morning tea. I was shaking off the cold on the patio of a small cafe as our bikes continued to arrive, and a local farmer stood up to greet me and enquired in broken English where we were all from. I replied "Australia" and the



man raised his eyebrows, patted his heart with his right hand, and murmured, "Ah, ANZAC!" He proceeded to shake hands with all 16 of us as we gratefully drank warm Turkish tea.

The man eventually looked at his watch and made to leave, but I saw him go inside to the cashier. He came back outside and waved farewell, again patting his heart, saying, "ANZAC; nothing to pay, ANZAC". He'd just paid for 16 cups of tea for 16 complete strangers.

**'THE FRIENDLINESS OF
THE TURKISH PEOPLE
IS LEGENDARY... IT'S
A LEGACY OF GALLIPOLI,
WHERE WE DEVELOPED
A MUTUAL RESPECT.'**



'THE GREATEST MOUNTAIN RANGE ON EARTH ALSO COMES WITH THE GREATEST CANYONS, MASSIVE RIVERS, HUGE PLAINS AND SWEEPING PLATEAU.'

1

Khardung La, Ladakh, India

The highest road in the world has become something of a pilgrimage for motorcyclists in recent years. High in the Himalayan region of Ladakh in northern India, K-Top, as it is affectionately known, reaches the dizzying altitude of 5,600 metres. There is some contention as to whether it is still actually the highest road, as the Chinese claim to have recently built a higher one just across the border, but it is apparently only navigable by 4WDs and mountain goats.

When I first took a group to Khardung La in 1995 we were the only bikes there; indeed we may have been the only bikes in Ladakh. Nowadays there are many tour operators cashing

in on its popularity and there are often dozens of bikes up there from several different companies on each day of the limited season. I believe I may lay claim to holding the record for the number of ascents; I have ridden this road several times every year since 1995 and have stood on the top more than 50 times.

The attraction is simply the scale of the Himalayas. The greatest mountain range on earth also comes with the greatest canyons, massive rivers, huge plains and sweeping plateaus. The Khardung La is still relatively low compared to Everest's height of 8,848 metres, but it's two-and-a-half times Kosciuszko.



At the top of the pass you can gaze towards Pakistan to the west, China to the north and India to the south. Three of the world's nuclear powers stare off at each other here, in a volatile and unsteady relationship. The road to the top is a military route built by the Indian Army and special permission is required from the authorities.

Convoys of army trucks are a constant obstacle and the road is poorly-maintained; there are deep potholes, sharp rocks, muddy streams and washouts, snow and ice on the road, even in summer. All these add a challenging dimension which makes the final achievement of standing on the top of the world so much more satisfying. [ms](#)

Mike Ferris

ON THE UNIQUE ATTRACTIONS AND CHALLENGES OF RIDING A BIKE IN SOME OF THE MOST SCENIC BUT DEMANDING ROUTES IN THE WORLD.

What's the real appeal of riding these roads? More than the scenery, we're guessing?

Somebody once said of motorcycling, "If I have to explain it, you wouldn't understand." It goes some way to describing the mildly euphoric feeling riding a motorcycle brings – particularly in unfamiliar territory. Everybody who travels understands the magic of discovering and exploring a new destination. The trouble is most 'standard' forms of travel aren't very flexible or independent. A motorcycle is just about the ultimate expression of independent terrestrial travel; you can go where and when you want, you can stop where and when you want. Through Ferris Wheels, we strive to find that happy balance between providing essential support and infrastructure, and allowing the freedom and independence people expect from being on their own two wheels.

What are the attributes of your top-10 great rides?

It's always going to be highly subjective. Some people love corners (or 'twisties' as they're commonly known) and other people hate 'em. But as a general rule the Top 10 includes a well-maintained road offering well-cambered, wide sweeping corners, a good surface, little traffic, varied topography and sensational scenery, with a cold beer or hot coffee waiting at the end.

What are the motivations of most people who come on the rides? The same as yours when you left the corporate world?

Ha! No, I left the nine-to-five world behind because I was looking for a permanent lifestyle change. Most people who come on tours with us are probably only looking for a temporary fix. Our high demographic is in their 40s or 50s and happy enough in their work environment, but need to cut loose every now and then.

Are most people who come on the rides usually very experienced?

As a general rule, yes. We've had a small number of people join us with little riding experience and usually they acquit themselves rather well because they recognise their limits and are appropriately circumspect. Our worst nightmare is the guy who's been riding for 40 years and knows everything; he's the one who becomes very interested in cleaning his fingernails while we're giving a group briefing on how dangerous the road might be, then wipes himself out on a tight corner trying to show us all how good he is.

This is not 'glamping' (glam camping) is it?

No way is this glamping! However, the tours we offer do cover a wide range of 'comfort factors'.

A gentle three-week tour of Morocco or Turkey might only have one or two days where you arrive at the hotel mildly exhausted from a 400km run, whereas in the

Indian Himalayas we sometimes only cover 150km in a day but it's a damned hard day's work!

There is some danger involved – have you had some close calls?

Motorcycling can be dangerous; it's inherent in its very nature. There's very little protection and if you get it wrong it's generally gonna hurt a lot more than if you were in a car or a bus. Touch wood, we've never yet had a fatality on any of our tours in 18 years, but we've certainly seen the inside of far too many hospitals in many countries as we patch up people with broken bones. We've had to repatriate a few over the years and we've certainly put their travel insurance to the test! We insist that anyone participating in a tour must take out comprehensive travel insurance; we won't take them without it, it's not worth the risk.

[ferriswheels.com.au](#)

