

# TALES FROM THE TOURS

THEY SAY THAT WHAT HAPPENS ON  
THE ROAD STAYS ON THE ROAD.  
UNLESS IT MAKES IT INTO ROAD RIDER...

STORY: MARK HINCHLIFFE

**A**dventure travel is by nature fraught with misadventures. And that's what we love about it; the unexpected, the strange coincidences, the silly crashes, the unusual animal encounters, interactions with the locals, and those ridiculous situations that just tickle our funny bones and colour in our travel books.

We asked some of the top motorcycle travel providers for colourful anecdotes from their tours in far-flung exotic places as well as on our own doorstep, and this is what we found.

## FERRIS WHEELS

### ANZACS AND CRICKET

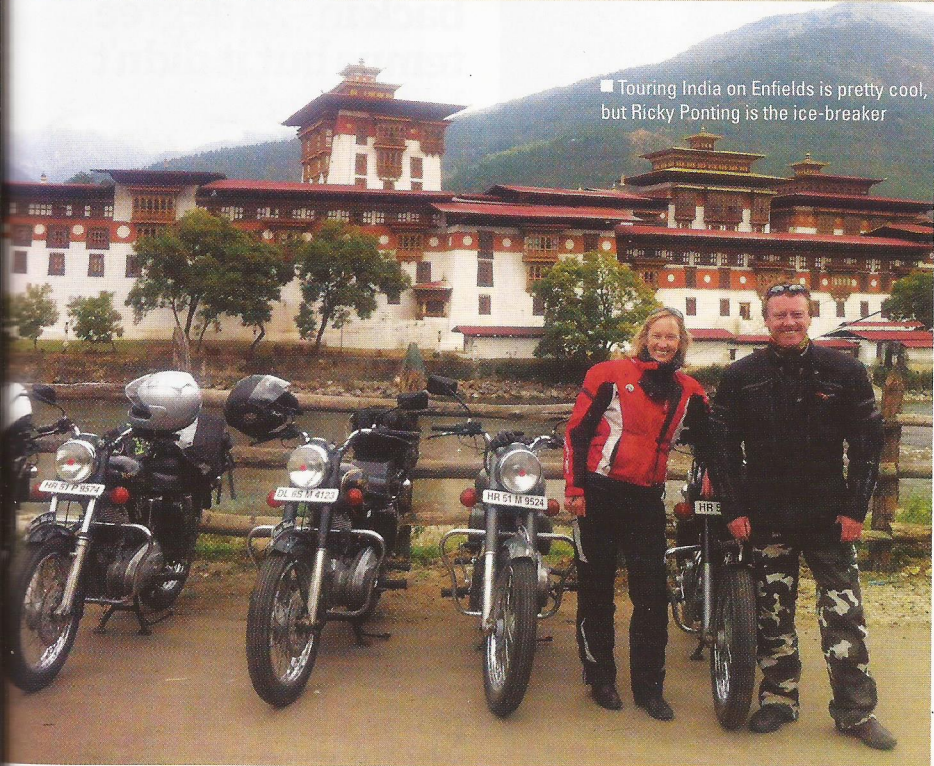
Mike and Denise Ferris came from the corporate world a couple of decades ago to start their travel company, and even after all these years they still don't hire guides to do their jobs. They conduct tours through the Himalaya, Bhutan, the Andes, Dalmatians, Morocco, Iceland and Turkey where they find the people "amazingly friendly and hospitable", considering the Anzacs invaded their country during WWI.

"It is quite astonishing to receive such warmth and welcoming from a people who have every right to hold a grudge against us," Mike says. "I have a vivid memory of one such example. It was a cold bleak morning on the Black Sea coast; we had started fairly early and after a couple of hours riding I felt it might be time for a warming cuppa. In a quiet little town I easily found the ubiquitous tea-house, and swung the bike to a stop outside. I was aware of being scrutinised as I dismounted and took off my helmet, jacket and gloves.

"As I walked up to the small elevated terrace, a local gent rose from a table of men smoking and drinking tea, greeted me in a friendly manner, and with almost no English, enquired which country I might be from. When I replied







■ Touring India on Enfields is pretty cool, but Ricky Ponting is the ice-breaker

Australia, his eyebrows shot up with delight and he cried 'Ah, Anzac!' and he shook my hand so enthusiastically I thought he would dislocate my shoulder. Before I could even ask for a tea he turned and instructed the proprietor to bring me one. By now a few of the other motorcycles were starting to arrive and I answered his enquiring face with 'Evet, Australia

moto tour group'. Brilliant Turkish.

"He greeted quite a few of them in a similar fashion and then quietly went back to his conversation with his friends at the table as the rest of our group arrived and took tea. Then, after a short time, he looked at his watch, drained his chai glass and walked inside the teahouse. When he reappeared he paused halfway down the steps, turned to us and

said, 'My friends, nothing to pay. Anzacs.' He had just paid the bill for 16 glasses of tea for 16 complete strangers."

In Kashmir in July, 2004, Denise had not yet acquired her bike licence and was on the back seat of Mike's Enfield for her first trip across the Himalaya.

"Our group had been delayed, yet again, by interminable roadworks and impenetrable Indian bureaucracy, resulting in the less-than-desirable position of having to ride in the dark," Mike says. "The Enfield headlight is far from spectacular and there was little light from the moon. There had been recent unrest in the Vale of Kashmir, an almost perennial event to which I was quite accustomed, but which was inevitably unnerving to any newcomer.

"We were riding through a remote mountainous region on our way to crossing the Zoji La, the mountain pass leading down to Srinagar. For several hundred kilometres this area is a military zone and we had already run the gauntlet of passing through several checkpoints, where inspection of our passports had elicited a range of reactions from arrogant disinterest to almost hostile suspicion.

"We swooped along a dark valley full of shadows and swung through a corner to arrive at a bridge, and out of the darkness appeared two bright torch lights and we heard a shrill whistle. I heaved to a halt as two soldiers aggressively approached, and I could feel Denise's body language registering no small discomfort behind me at the sight of their AK-47 machine guns being held in prominent display.

"Stop!' commanded a rough voice. 'Where are you going?' We couldn't see the owner of the voice because the bright torch was being shone directly into our faces.

"Srinagar sir,' I replied in a casual voice. I had played this game before, but Denise's grip on my arm was far from relaxed.

"What purpose?' the voice demanded.

"Tourism, sir. We happen to be tourists.' I made a point of putting my hand up to deflect the light from the interrogation beacon in our eyes. I was expecting a demand for our passports but instead he lowered his torch a little and simply asked, 'Your country?'

"Australia, sir.'

"His dark face broke into a wide, white grin. 'Ah, Ricky Ponting very fine batsman! Please proceed.'" ►