


Adventuring in INDIA

by Alisa Clickenger (MotoAdventureGal)



They say that you either love traveling in India or you hate it. They say that India is beautiful. They say the traffic is terrible. They say that India is spiritual. They say that India is hot, dirty, and full of insects. I say that India is all of that, and so much more. I also say it's where you will find some of the best and most colorful dual-sport riding in the world.

India is a huge country. Think of it as more like a continent: stretching from the high peaks of the Himalayas down to the Arabian Sea. India is a mega diverse country—and not just in terms of biodiversity. India is the second most populous country in the world with over 2,000 ethnic groups. India has over 4,000 miles of coastline, and has 22 official languages. Lucky for me, English is one of them.

Good Horn, Good Brake, Good Luck

It's a 14-hour flight from Newark to New Delhi, so I have quite a bit of time to chat with my Indian seat mate. He is astonished that I am traveling to India to ride a motorcycle for a month. While motorcycles and scooters are certainly a part of the culture there, it is an unusual form of transportation for women. We chat about traffic, tourism, and motorbiking to the far corners of the earth. At the end of the flight, in his charming sing-song accent, he wishes me "Good Horn, Good Brake, and Good Luck."

Himachal Pradesh

One of the truly incredible aspects of traveling in India is that you can ride 100 miles, and experience a completely different set of cultural beliefs, traditional dress, and gastronomical delicacies. Himachal Pradesh, where I have chosen to ride, is literally translated as "in the lap of the Himalayas." Himachal Pradesh is the least urbanized of India's 28 states, within a breath's distance of the Himalayas, so where better to explore the natural beauty of northern India?

Bijli Majadev: Lord Shiva and the Lingam

I've just finished a two week trans-Himalayan motorcycle tour with *Motorcycle Expeditions of India*. Two days of rest in Manali, the quaint mountain town at the northern end of the Kullu Valley, and I am ready to explore again. I've caught my wind—literally—as we'd ridden to over 18,000 feet on the tour and camped alongside the marmots. Buddhi Singh Chand, *Motorcycle Expeditions'* partner and primary guide, knows that I like the roads less traveled and offers to take me to see a remote temple that few tourists visit.

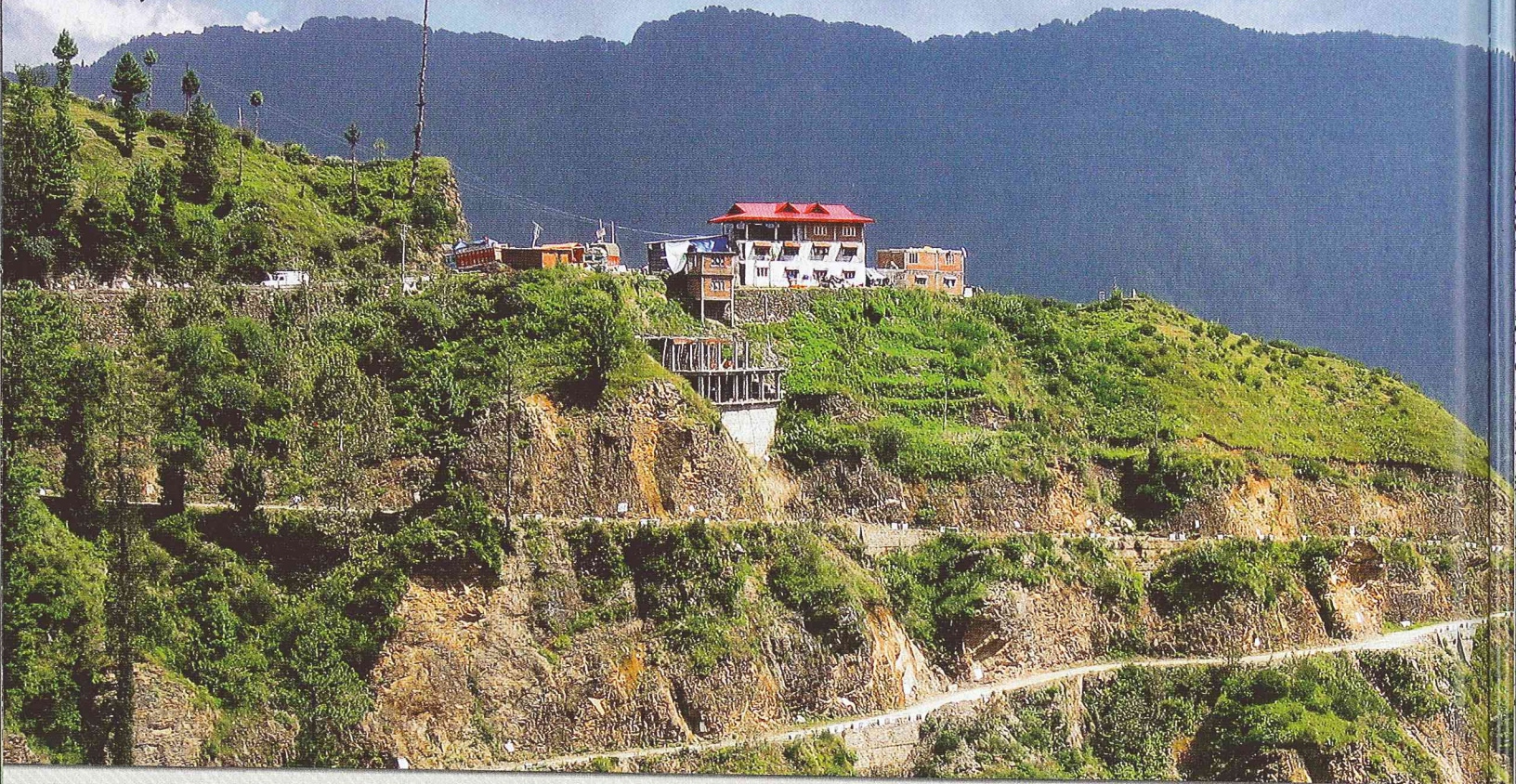
We take off early from Manali and ride through a couple of settlements, then stop for tea next to an impressive waterfall. I offer to take pictures for a couple. They, in turn, want a picture of me. I ask Buddhi how he knows they are on their honeymoon, and he points out the woman's beautiful bangle bracelets. In his society they are a cultural marker just like a wedding ring.



Love it.
Hate it.
Love it some
more...



Waterfalls are abundant in Himachal Pradesh as the snows and rains shed down the Himalayas.



We leave the waterfalls and ride through a deep, old-growth forest. Time almost stands still here, so much so that the “road” now transforms into a double-track that winds through woods, a small settlement, and directly through a farm yard with mud and manure at least a foot deep. Further along the trail, we compete for traction with a herd of cows on a narrow ledge, steadfastly ignoring the steep drop inches away that bleeds out into the Himalayan panorama.

We ride in first and second gear, slogging through mud, ruts, and more manure, and finally arrive at the temple which is eerily empty save a hermit, a groundskeeper, and a pack of dogs. We take turns watching the gear as we individually explore inside the temple. I remove my shoes and launch a tempest of flies as I mount the steps. Inside the temple is a phallus covered in lard. The smell is foul, contrasted by beautiful flower bud offerings to *Lord Shiva* and intricate carvings inside the temple. Welcome to the enigma that is India.

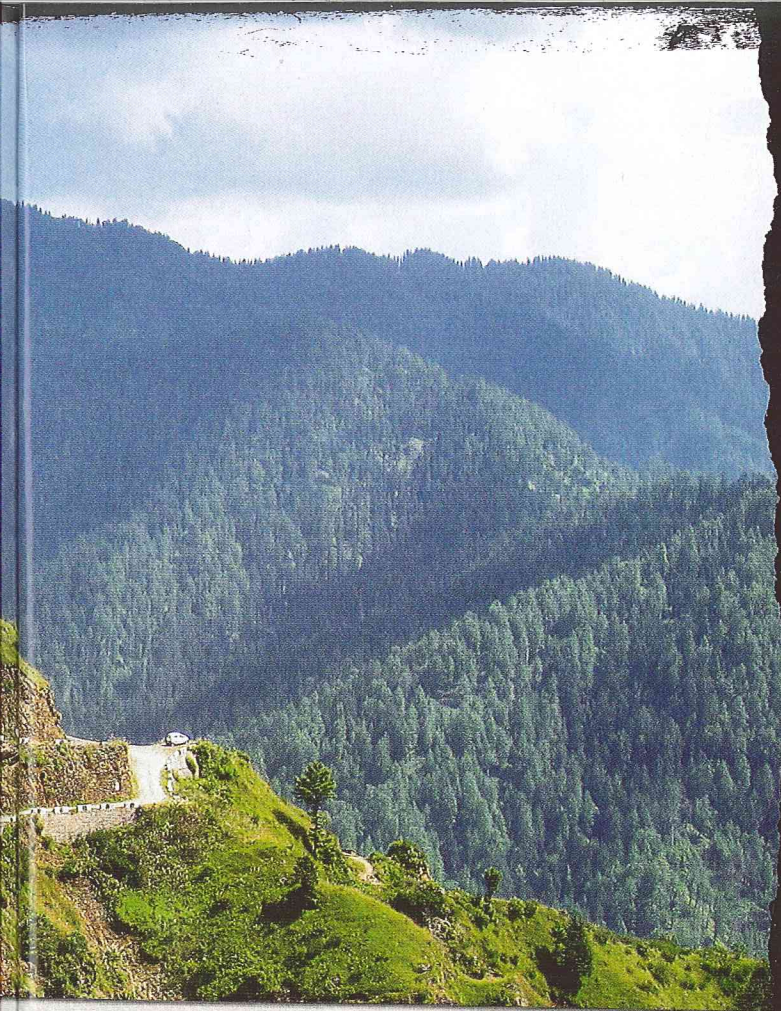
Already exhausted after 18 miles of rough road that has taken most of the day to travel, I am dismayed to think about the ride back to Manali. We now have to race the sunset to get off the mountain before darkness makes traversing the slippery wet clay and mud impossible. We have not eaten and I am grumpy. Adrenaline alone carries me through axle-deep mud, over slippery clay, and down the muddy track in the eventual dark.

Banjar Valley

I’m dry on the inside, but my gear is soaked. The *Royal Enfield Classic* does not have heated grips, and my fingers can barely stretch to cover the controls, which I know is dangerous. I am counting the kilometers as we descend from visiting the Prashar Temple, knowing that lower elevation means warmer temperatures. The rain has turned the dirt roadway slick, and I slide around corners on the bike’s street tires. I barely make it through a herd of water buffalo, which seem more disturbed by my unexpected and noisy presence than the freezing rain.

The lower elevation brings relief, yet it also brings the scariest tunnel I have ever ridden through. It is without illumination except for our headlights, there is no ventilation, and I begin to gasp in diesel fumes in a desperate effort to stay awake. Inside there are people on foot, some vehicles with no lights, and I am sure there are cows or other large quadrupeds just waiting to amble into my path. I focus on the specter of Buddhi’s rain poncho flapping in the breeze in order to keep my focus.

We then follow the river and ride up the Banjar Valley. Buddhi stops at a pullout alongside the river and beeps his horn. I am confused. I see a trolley with a waving man inside gliding towards us up above the narrow raging river, and light dawns. We park the bikes, my gear disappears, and then I gracelessly take a seat in the tiny basket in full motorcycle gear. I hold my breath as I sail across the river, boots up. I am on the other side being escorted to my room before I realize I forgot to take pictures.



His Holiness the Dalai Lama

There is a problem with my bike. I pull over to investigate, and it seems to be a wheel bearing. We have no spare bearings with us, so I have no choice but to ride and to hope that I can get it fixed before whatever happens when bearings fail happens. My mind races with possible outcomes. We eventually find a repair shop, and the mechanic starts into the repair. Evidently the *Royal Enfield Classic* is a difficult beast from which to remove the rear wheel, and the mechanic tells us he does not want to work on the bike. No amount of persuasion can convince him to help us.

We are forced to ride on, now at a snail's pace, stopping at each town and asking for a motorcycle mechanic. Ironically, Buddhi's front wheel bearing chooses this same day to fail, so we both limp along like a raggedy pair. We finally find another mechanic, one who doesn't want to say no to anyone, and takes on three more customers as he dismembers our bikes. I am fascinated by the mechanic's two left thumbs and I want to take a picture. I refrain from doing so. The patrons of the shop are equally fascinated by me. They, too, refrain from taking my picture. The mechanic charges us 300 rupees for both repairs, which is about six dollars.

It seems like forever until we reach Dharamshala, which is the home-in-exile of the *Dalai Lama* and several thousand Tibetans. We have arrived after dark, and it has been my worst day of riding in India—fraught with delays, mind-boggling traffic, and breakdowns, culminating in

Must-Have Travel Kit for India

SteriPEN: This clever ultraviolet device that turns bad water to good, one liter at a time. It saves the environment by eliminating all those throw-away plastic bottles. And believe me, you'll want to drink purified water in India. Steripen.com

Camera: As experienced moto traveler Carla King says, "You cannot take a bad picture in India."

Travel Insurance Accidents: They happen, and the riding can be pretty crazy in India. Not to mention your first few days getting accustomed to riding on the left side of the road....

Torch/Flashlight/Headlamp: Handy for overnight stays in rural villages without electricity as well as for those times when the power goes out.

Buff: You'll want something around your neck that you can pull up and cover your nose when the diesel fumes get to be too much. Doubles as a dust mask. BuffUSA.com

Hat: Sun hat in the South and a winter hat in the North for when you take your helmet off. Easily purchased in India.

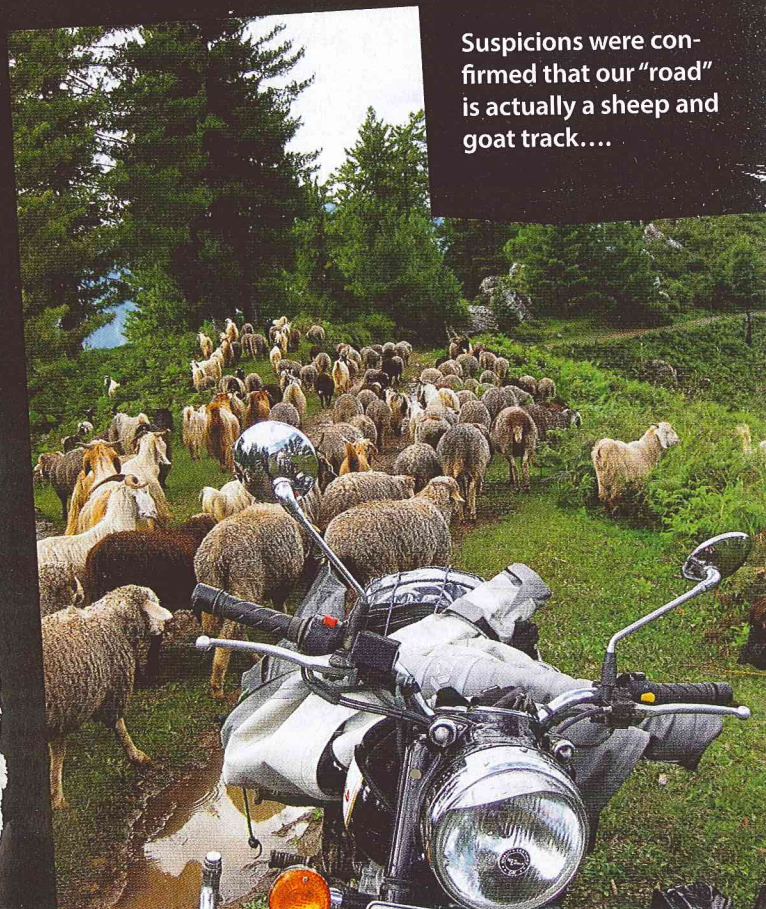
Resources:

MotorcycleExpeditions.com

60kph.com

MustSeeIndia.com/Himachal-Pradesh

IndianMotorcycle.com



the dangers of riding after dark in India. Once again Buddhi takes a "back way" into town, traversing terrain similar to that found in an *Indiana Jones* movie—thin swatches of pavement amidst giant washouts of earth and asphalt. Luckily I arrive unscathed.

My luck holds, and I get a room in a nice hotel with a prime view of the *Dalai Lama's* residence. Then, even luckier, I am told that the *Dalai Lama* will be making a rare public appearance on the next day. I attend the event and am awed to be able to witness the Tibetan ritual of creating a mandala for the long life and the continued good health of *His Holiness*. I do not personally meet *His Holiness* the *Dalai Lama*, but I get close enough to feel his *Presence*, and I am moved to tears.

Dharamshala is where I say goodbye to Buddhi and my *Royal Enfield Classic 500*. It's been an unbelievably reliable ride considering the abuse I put it through. I've hit giant potholes at 40 miles per hour, and filled it with incredibly bad gas. I barely lubed the chain, and I hammered the throttle and brakes every day in traffic. I buried it in axle-deep mud and nearly drowned it in several deep water crossings. Yet the only repairs I've had to do have been front and rear wheel bearings. It's been the perfect bike for visiting India.

From high mountains to roadside wonders, between frenetic bazaars to quiet temples, India is a contradiction you can never quite prepare for. Just when you think you've gotten your bearings, India will throw you a loop, and fray the nerves of even the most experienced moto traveler. Expect the unexpected as you ride, and you'll have the motorcycle trip of a lifetime. MotorcycleExpeditions.com **ADV**

(Top) Man vs. mountain... walking up to the Jakhoo Temple in Shimla (if you can get past the monkeys). **(Right)** After thousands of kilometers of abuse, a wheel bearing replacement is in order. **(Bottom, right)** Tired and hungry, I need help pushing my bike out of the ruts with mud so deep the luggage racks catch. **(Below)** The author with her *Royal Enfield*. Breathtaking and breathless views of the Himalayas at 2,500 meters.

TEST YOUR PHYSICAL FITNESS WALK TO JAKHOO TEMPLE

LESS THAN 30 YEAR AGE

UPTO 30 MINUTES	ABSOLUTELY FIT
30 MINUTES TO 45 MINUTES	FIT
45 MINUTES TO 60 MINUTES	NEED IMPROVEMENT
OVER 60 MINUTES	UNFIT

AGE 30 YEARS TO 50 YEARS

UPTO 45 MINUTES	ABSOLUTELY FIT
45 MINUTES TO 60 MINUTES	FIT
OVER 60 MINUTES	NEED IMPROVEMENT

AGE 50 YEARS TO 70 YEARS

UPTO 55 MINUTES	ABSOLUTELY FIT
55 MINUTES TO 70 MINUTES	FIT
OVER 70 MINUTES	NEED IMPROVEMENT

OVER 70 YEARS

YOU ARE FIT IF YOU CAN WALK TO JAKHOO

SHRI HANUMAN TEMPLE TRUST, JAKHOO

