

Crossing borders and bridging cultures

Having set out from Munich in May, destined for Bangkok, Sebastian Klein is making steady progress aboard his BMW F 800 GS. Since leaving Bavaria on 17 May, he has already travelled through Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. The 27-year-old is currently in the Yazd region of Iran, and reveals that the Persian Gulf has thrown up many pleasant surprises.



His journey of discovery is well underway, and with the Indian subcontinent beckoning, Sebastian has taken time to reflect on the past 10,000 kilometres of his 25,000-kilometre odyssey. Such a journey is bound to throw up a few surprises, particularly when travelling through parts of the world where other soul-searchers fear to tread.

However, the BMW Motorrad employee is still relishing life on the move. "I'm loving being on the road. It has given me an immense feeling of liberty, and I'm free to travel where I want, when I want," he says. "I've been doing a lot of kilometres and have therefore managed to get my bike serviced at the first scheduled service stop. After staying in Varna in Bulgaria for the European Championships, I then rode to Istanbul for the service. We had already planned ahead by sending all the spare parts we would need to Turkey so there was no real drama there."

While in Turkey, Sebastian set about the difficult task of making a GPS drawing, with the help of BMW Motorrad's international marketing agency, 180 Amsterdam. The explorer had first carried out a GPS drawing in Slovakia, but he admits that the hustle and bustle of Turkey's capital city proved a challenging venue for this particular task.

"The GPS drawing in Istanbul was great fun, but really hard work, particularly in the heavy traffic!" jokes Sebastian. "BMW Motorrad's marketing agency, 180 Amsterdam sent me the coordinates and using the Motorrad Navigator's GPS tracking function I could spell out 'I was here' with GPS drawing, which can be seen on the Google

Earth map. We'll show this soon on the <http://gps.bmw-motorrad.com> website, as I think a lot of people will be interested in this function."

Not only did Sebastian experience his F 800 GS in a city centre environment, courtesy of the GPS task, he also travelled to the mountains to the east of the country to visit some of the most remarkable terrain on Earth. "On my way through Turkey, I spent some time in Cappadocia, which is a stunning part of the world. It's a strange mountain formation with erosion lines all around. It's like another planet."



But on his whistle-stop tour of the world, there was little time to hang around. As soon as he was given a visa for entry into Iran, 'Sepp' was back on the road. A much-maligned country of late, the area formerly known as Persia would not be on many people's holiday wish list, but intrepid Sebastian wanted to discover the truth about the arid land. Would the way of life in Iran be as desolate as its desert plains? According to Sebastian, nothing could be further from the truth.

"Esfahan was the first stop in Iran and I spent a week in that beautiful city," he says. "Regardless of what people may see on the news about Iran, the people are perhaps the friendliest on the planet. Because they are not used to seeing that many tourists, you are welcomed with open arms. Within two hours I had been invited to lunch, and at the very least almost everyone you meet wants to have tea with you. You just don't get a clear picture of what a country is like until you visit with an open mind."

"But there are a few drawbacks to being in Iran," Sebastian admits. "Firstly, there is no alcohol here, but the locals tell me you can have a good time drinking tea – it's all about using your imagination! Secondly, the road conditions are not great. There seem to be no traffic laws whatsoever!"

So when faced with tricky road conditions outside the large cities, Sebastian is grateful to have a bike capable of coping in the harshest environments. "The bike has been absolutely fantastic," he reveals. "I've had no problems at all. I was a little worried when I was riding through the desert and I saw on the bike's monitor that the

temperature was 43 degrees Celsius. I thought that perhaps there may be a problem with overheating, but I was wrong and it ran fine. We changed the suspension before getting to Turkey and that seems to be working really well, so I've got nothing to complain about."

What lies ahead for Sebastian is one of the toughest phases of his trip. Although the journey has been planned for some time, he is unsure of the timetable of events, but knows he must reach New Dehli by August to meet up with a friendly face. "I'm not really sure of my next step just yet," he admits. "I may spend another week in Iran, as I've enjoyed the place so much, but the next port of call will be Pakistan. I must admit that I'm a little apprehensive as it's a place that I know very little about, but that is all part of the experience. After Pakistan I'll travel the east coast of India and head to New Dehli for a rendezvous with my girlfriend, who is flying out to meet me."



For more information about Sebastian Klein's Munich to Bangkok trip, please visit his www.seppotage.com website, which features a regular blog and satellite tracking information.