

## **2 motorbikes and a 1,500KM search along the Arabian Sea**

An Indian journalist friend of mine once summarized the driving experience with a proverbial note “Here, we don’t drive on the left side of the road, we drive on what is left of the road.” With his wise words in mind, my friend James aka Skip and I decided to explore what the Indian coastline had to offer, both in the water and on the road.

In October last year, with the help of a local welder, Skip and I, customized two Yamaha FZ street bikes with locally designed lock-boxes, luggage panniers and surf racks made from plumbing pipes. After a couple of test runs in the small coastal state of Goa, a former Portuguese colony, we were ready to start our descent into the deep south of India via the iconic National Highway 66, a route sandwiched between the Arabian Sea, a dense labyrinth of rivers and the Western Ghats, a steep mountain range that runs parallel to the western coast of India. This was going to be Skip's first visit to India and my first trip down the coast of India on a motorbike. We would both be in for plenty of surprises in the land of 1.3 billion.

The Western Ghats are a catchment for any and all precipitation as well as an endless source for sand to be deposited into well-formed but extremely sheltered river mouths below. For most of the year India receives long period swell in very small size from storms originating around South Africa, but the main weather phenomenon that dictates the life timings of all manner of living species in this subcontinent as well as the possibility for real waves is the legendary Southwest monsoon which arrives like clockwork on the first week of June in the form of a dark and ominous cloud bank that hovers over the Arabian Sea from Sri Lanka to Madagascar. Slightly before and after the monsoon (May & October), the west coast of India receives long period larger swell and all the perfect setups that were dormant start to light up in remarkable ways, and with predictable winds. This window is miniscule though and lasts maybe only a few weeks to a month at best. Once the monsoon has announced it’s arrival, three to four meter swells running with around ten to twelve second periods are common but a relentless gale force onshore flow is impregnated within each swell. During this time, the varied coastline of points, river mouths, peninsulas, islands and bays open up an array of possibilities for those whom are keen enough.

We left, albeit nervously, from Goa and continued through to the southernmost areas of Kerala in the far south of India, an approximate 1,500 kilometers from start to finish. The route is a true testament to the cultural diversity of India as we passed through regions home to Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities. We struggled with a weak grasp of Hindi and the situation was made worse as the languages transitioned from Goa’s Konkani to Karnataka’s Kannada into Kerala’s Malayalam with the addition of a host of numerous regional languages that changed with the passing of each local district. Not only religion, language and political preferences but also food differed every 100 kilometers we travelled, as the traditional fish plates of Goa eventually segued into a daily feast of dosa, chutney & sambhar.

As it was the tail end of the southwest monsoon season, the entire coastline was alive in green foliage and intermittent downpours peppered our journey south. Our descent originated in more rural terrain but eventually moved into areas of frightening population density, we really didn’t know what to expect as the voyage itself took us

through a synergy of diverse demographics from varied subsistence fishing communities to technology hubs within major urban areas.

Our search for waves was not devoid of an experience with politics. In one district in Kerala, with a drastically opposing sociopolitical populace living side by side, we found ourselves in the middle of a violent political conflict between two opposing political parties, the CPM Marxist party and the BJP Hindu nationalist party. This day saw a full scale strike enforced by the BJP majority throughout the state in protest of a series of back to back killings between the two parties, and left the usually vehicle jammed roads entirely void of any obstacles. For 24 hours we rode fast in barren streets that felt otherworldly as our sojourn up to this point had been mostly characterized by eight lanes of cows, rickshaws, overloaded trucks, cats, monkeys, swerving lopsided buses and deep-cratered potholes. It was a bizarre sight that left us elated.

Regardless of where we were, our bikes and the concept of surfing created an abyss of wide eyed interest from all walks of life, which was due considering that surfing has only recently started to cover ground on the Indian coastline and we were interrupting everyday life with an obscure leisure activity, not to mention that our motorbikes were a pure anomaly from the canon of highway vernacular with their asymmetrical wings and colorful boxes. By relentlessly checking the different setups we saw and pairing it with swell models, we were rewarded for our fastidious labor with empty waves and a hunger to search even deeper within India for the chance of more solitary sessions.