



**Clockwise from above:** Karen at Kozhikode beach on the Malabar Coast. Palm trees are abundant along the shores of the Arabian Sea. With temperatures sometimes topping 35°C, finding shade now and again was essential. Passers-by were unfailingly friendly; many also wanted photos for Instagram



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nightfall, we finally reached the turnoff from the main road. Although we were still riding in darkness, the more peaceful country lanes that wound through dense vegetation and backwaters allowed us to relax a bit as we headed towards the small town of Gokarna and a bed for the night.

### INSTAGRAMMING THE JOURNEY

We continued our journey south along winding roads, passing through lush hills thick with jungle, and descended to emerald green waters dotted with boats. A small ferry carried us across the water and a cooling breeze evaporated our sweat and reinvigorated us for the afternoon's challenging terrain. As we meandered through quaint villages, we were often greeted by the sounds of music, dance, drumming or colourful temple events. The festive atmosphere, along with refreshing lime sodas and spicy samosas, lifted our spirits and propelled us south.

People we met along the way radiated a warmth and joy that was palpable. Their infectious smiles made us smile wider too, and we were enchanted by their generosity and apparent happiness. "Instagram?" called the young men that passed us on mopeds. As I called out "handbikedarke", followers rose exponentially. Gradually we were greeted by strangers who had anticipated us via their friends' social media feeds. Despite the poverty we also witnessed, we were riding through a smartphone-connected country.



### Transporting the trike

My handbike (trike) fortunately splits in two. I use a Mystic kite-surfing bag ([mysticboarding.com](http://mysticboarding.com)) to transport it on planes. It fits in neatly, with bubble wrap and some clothes as padding, and the wheels in a separate wheel bag. At the start of a one-way journey like this, I post the bag to a hotel at the end of the route that I have pre-arranged things with. To avoid major roadworks and dangerous sections, or trunk-road bridges where there was no shoulder on the road, I split my trike to fit it into the back of a vehicle.

As we settled into life on the move, we noticed that Kerala's roads were smoother, the surroundings cleaner and the vibe more relaxed. However, the road was undergoing a major upgrade to a wide highway with barriers and a central reservation. Navigating this massive construction site proved challenging, with rough sections, frustrated drivers and clouds of dust. While the landscape remained beautiful in many places, the scars of development were evident. Concrete and tarmac encroached on what was once a thriving ecosystem. I felt sadness for what was lost.

### OUT IN THE MIDDAY SUN

The founder of Hope Community Village, a Yorkshireman named John Veitch, had cycled from Hope to Goa on a fundraising journey back in 1996. Nearly 30 years later, we found ourselves inadvertently cycling his route in reverse. We learned that John's journey had often taken him further east, into the hills of the Western Ghats.

He shared his memoir with us. "I wasn't short of advice from all directions, particularly on the route, places to stay and places to avoid. Much of it I ignored, but the best advice – to set off early each day to avoid cycling in the midday sun – I gladly ▶