

followed. Everyone was concerned about how I would handle the chaotic traffic, and it didn't take long to realise they were right to be."

Though separated by three decades, our concerns mirrored his. The heat was relentless, scorching us even in the early hours. The traffic was erratic and unnerving. Despite our best efforts to start early, the sun's rays would quickly penetrate our jerseys, leaving us drenched in sweat that dried into white salt stains. Mechanical issues with our 'quality Indian bike' often disrupted our morning progress, forcing us to pedal through the sweltering midday heat.

The traffic was more alarming than on any previous journeys I had taken in India – faster and busier, with express buses barrelling down on us unpredictably. While we were grateful for the chaotic mix of rickshaws and bikes that kept drivers alert and slowed the general pace, there were moments when it felt like a dangerous game of roulette.

We adapted our route, opting for smaller, winding lanes that led us through beach fronts, jungles, villages and narrow paths weaving between homes and gardens. This safer, more scenic path allowed us to engage more closely with local life. While navigation could be challenging and our progress southward slowed, we found the peaceful cycling and beautiful landscapes we had earlier envisioned.

When we couldn't avoid treacherous areas or busy roads over major bridges, we chose survival and flagged down local rickshaw trucks or similar vehicles to shuttle us safely around the danger zones.

ENDING WITH HOPE

Finally, we experienced the true joys of cycle touring in Kerala. A friendly local family invited us to stay with them for the night. Ahmed, a young



Above: With beach after beach on their route south, Karen missed her ICE Full Fat trike for freedom on the sand
Below: The ferry to Fort Kochi, a tourist destination that in the early 16th century was home to Portugal's Fort Emmanuel

“ Sky merged with water, and the sun sank into a faraway horizon. Rustling palms lulled us to sleep ”

cyclist from the Kerala Cycle Club, found us on the road and joined us for a few days. His enthusiasm was infectious and his vibrant club jersey a stark contrast to the worn condition of his bike and tyres. We were amazed at how far he rode, navigating potholes in the darkness with no lights, with no snacks and very limited water. We admired his resilience and passion for the sport, and felt grateful for the equipment and resources we had.

In between riding we immersed ourselves in Kerala's rich culture and history. We gazed down from the walls of the ancient fort in Bekal, which stand sheer above the Arabian Sea, and wandered the alleyways of Fort Kochi, bustling with hippy tourists. Glyn took some refreshing evening dips in the sea. I wished I could swap my skinny wheelchair tyres for my ICE Full Fat wheels to whisk me over the sand.

Sky merged with water, and the sun sank into a faraway horizon. Rustling palms lulled us to sleep. One night in an Ayurvedic spa provided a luxurious contrast to our usual mosquito-ridden lodgings, with plank-hard beds and rickety fans.

As we settled into the rhythm of life on the road, the end of our journey was already in sight. We got news that some of the children from the Hope Community Village would greet us on their bikes and ride the final few kilometres with us through the lanes to the gates of Hope. We arrived through a funnel of cheering children and staff, an incredible welcome and end to our journey.

The children in Hope effuse joy and fun, despite the tough starts they have all had. They were a reminder, as was our whole tour, that whatever our circumstances, our attitude and a supportive environment act as balm for our souls. ●

