

Experiencing the Unknown Overland from Europe to Australia

By Ralf Krautheimer

“Shipping?” was the comment of my wife Ute when I told her to ship our camper to Australia. “We gonna drive there!” The project was born. After some deep analysis of the possible routing, whether via China or via India, we found out that some South-East-Asian countries do not allow to enter with your own vehicle.



So, we decided to book an organized group tour with the agency “Abenteuer Touren”. The advantage of using this agency is that they organize all the visa, road permits, camp sites etc. Also, they provide a vast sightseeing program. However, you can drive freely and not in a convoy.

It took us about six months to prepare our Toyota Hilux and our Four Wheel Camper Wildcat (FWC Fleet model in USA) and to organize all documents required.

We started 10th July 2022 from our hometown in Germany and passed Austria, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria quite quickly to meet the group in Istanbul / Turkey. A total of 16 campers and two guide cars departed eastbound from Istanbul on 3rd August. One of the highlights in Turkey was a wonderful hot air balloon sunrise tour in Cappadocia. Further on we visited the rather unknown countries Georgia and Armenia.

We crossed the Iranian border end of August. The hospitality of the Iranian people is legendary and this proved to be more than true. Our cars were often surrounded by hundreds of people, asking lots of questions and offering food and drinks. We were even invited for lunch or dinner. The friendliness was overwhelming. We visited beautiful cities like Tabriz, Isfahan and Shiraz, explored caves, ancient temples and fortresses. One of the highlights was Persepolis, the 2500-year-old capital of the ancient Persian kingdom. We camped together with hundreds of Iranians on public car parks or isolated in the desert or on the shores of dried salt lakes.

Entering Pakistan was an adventure. We never saw so many Kalashnikovs, crossing Balochistan was only possible with a military escort. We had to drive 1,000 miles in a convoy, from dusk till dawn, two days in a row. Right-hand-drive and suicidal motorbike and bus drivers increased the stress. However, when we had to stop in villages, people were very curious and friendly and we were disappointed why we had to rush through. A short stop at Islamabad and we continued, now at a much slower pace, our trip into the northern part of Pakistan. We drove the famous Karakorum Highway into the Hunza Valley. "Highway" was slightly exaggerated: it is a gravel road, bumpy, narrow, dusty. 20 miles an hour was average speed. Hunza valley paid for



all this effort. Looking up to the highest mountains in the world like Nanga Parbat (8,125 meters / 26,660 feet) is truly breathtaking. We spent a week in this region, including a ride up to the 4,693 meter /15,400 feet Khunjerab pass to catch a glimpse of China which is on the other side of the pass.

Driving further, back via Islamabad, we reached India on 10th of October. The tourism ministry promotes this country with the slogan "incredible India" and this hits the nail on the head. You cannot describe this 1.4 billion inhabitant country in words or pictures, you have to see, hear, feel and smell this country. It is incredible and unbelievable. Beautiful landscapes, charming cities, enchanting temples, friendly people, tasty food but also heavily littered areas, polluted air and crazy drivers.



A must-see in India is the Taj Mahal, we visited this breathtaking building at sunrise, experiencing the change of color from pink to white. The Kari Mata temple where thousands of rats are revered as holy animals. Temples carved out of massive stone. In contrast to that the vibrant cities of Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata where people live, cook, eat, wash and sleep on the streets. We visited a number of national parks and saw tigers, leopards, rhinos and crocodiles. We relaxed a week on the beaches of Goa and shipped the backwaters of Kerala.

Meanwhile it turned out that we could not proceed our travel as planned. Due to the civil war, we could not drive through Myanmar. We had to ship our cars from Mumbai to Bangkok.



On the northern frontier of India is the small Himalayan kingdom Bhutan which restricts visitors and normally does not allow foreigners to enter with their cars. Due to the excellent contacts of our agency, we were allowed to visit this beautiful country. In contrast to India, it was very clean and well organized. We did some wonderful hikes like to the famous tiger nest, a monastery at 3,120 meter / 10,200

feet, and to temples and fortresses. Roads were extremely difficult to drive and our Toyota was often on 4WD, the cabin was shaken up and down and from left to right - without any damage. Being in high altitude the nights were cold down to freezing temperatures, thanks to our heating we felt warm and cozy in our cabin.

We travelled further to Nepal which is far bigger than Bhutan and a lot more touristic. We were surprised by the variety of landscapes and vegetation. Nepal expands from 200 to more than 8,000 meters above sea level (500 to 30,000 feet), you can visit national parks to see tigers and rhinos and you can climb the highest mountain in the world, Mount Everest. We visited the “state” capital Kathmandu and the “trekking” capital Pokhara and did some nice hiking tours.

On the way to Mumbai, we passed Varanasi, the holy city at the river Ganges where strictly religious Hindus pilgrim to die and be burnt on the riverbanks. Upon arrival in Mumbai end of February 2023, we prepared our car and the cabin for the shipping to Bangkok. It was a sad farewell to leave our camper which had become our home on this eight-month journey.

We cannot wait to receive our camper in Bangkok and driving it further on to Australia.

