



# NEWSLETTER

## Dear People

HELLO AND WELCOME to a very short Blazing Trails Nuisance-letter... what with enjoying a long ride around South Africa and Namibia, we have had very little time for all these marketing-type shenanigans.

This edition is mainly to make prospective travellers a special offer and to introduce some feedback from our Johannesburg to Cape Town tour, which we inaugurated this spring.

We hope to see you soon and ride safe in the meantime...



Damon & Suzie

## A WHATOL?

A UK company offering any 'flight element' to a tour abroad must have an ATOL from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), whether this flight is international, or a domestic flight in a destination country. Those offering such holidays without an ATOL are operating outside the law.

The ATOL scheme offers the highest level of passenger protection in the world ensuring that if an operator goes bust you will not lose any

money that has been paid. If you are abroad at the time, the CAA will arrange for you to finish your holiday and fly home.



## A VERY SPECIAL DEAL



IT'S SHORT NOTICE, but if you can make it we're offering a £300 last-minute discount on our tour between Leh and Manali, flying on 13th July this year. The reason: we have a bunch of bikes going from Manali to Leh, but hardly anyone joining us on the way back and we've got bikes to shift.

So, if you fancy a very small-group trip over the world's highest roads, then check out [THE TOUR here](#). It is an amazing journey to the outer edge of where it's possible for humans to survive and includes never-to-be-forgotten riding and scenic views.

That's £2595 for two weeks, including flights (international return and domestic flight), accommodation, support vehicle, mechanics, medic and, of course, breakfast.

If you would like to join us on this adventure, please [contact us](#) to make your discounted booking.

## FOLLOW ADAM

BLAZING TRAILS staffer, Adam Lewis, is off on his bike again. Already having crossed some 50 countries and having covered over 250,000km, Adam is now on his way to Siberia, where he will be tackling the Road of Bones. Anyone interested in adventure travel by



motorcycle should follow [HIS BLOG](#): It's full of adventurous tales and humour, plus lots of useful information on routes and border crossings.

Adam will be parking his bike in Kyrgyzstan over the winter, so he can join us as a guide on our [Nepal Tours](#). Best of luck short, bald, fast old fella!

## FEATURED TOUR – JOHANNESBURG TO CAPE TOWN

ALTHOUGH WE only had three riders on our first Johannesburg to Cape Town tour, we regard it as a great success – not least because we had the perfect excuse to ride this fantastic route again ourselves. This 17-day trip takes in the best road riding to be found in the country (and possibly the planet), visiting mountains, desert and the sparkling Indian Ocean.

Riding the along the Garden Route, through the Drakensberg Mountains and across the Little Karoo desert means it's cracking biking all the way – and then you've got the Cape Peninsula, plus a couple of days in fabulous Cape Town to enjoy.

Next year's tour kicks off on 15th February. Details [HERE](#).



## RESH CHAND

Resh, 59, who has done six previous trips with Blazing trails, has ridden in 28 countries on four continents. Here is what he made of South Africa and the tour: "As a biking country, South Africa comes pretty much at the top of my list. I love riding in Europe too, but if I were heading for a more faraway place, then South Africa would be number one.

"The roads were very quiet – sometimes we only passed one car in an hour. Only in towns and cities do you get a bit of traffic.

"The trip has been full of surprises – all pleasant ones. The weather was gorgeous, except for one thunderstorm, which gave us an exciting river crossing.

"People have been very friendly and the service you get – and the smiles that come with it – is very genuine. With my Indian roots I was half-expecting to meet with some racial prejudices, but there was absolutely no tension at all.

"Because there's only a two-hour time difference, we didn't get any jet-lag, despite it being a 12-hour journey to get out there, which is a plus as we didn't lose any days to that. The exchange rate also means things are quite a bit cheaper than in Europe. I would definitely come back."

## BRIAN FOSTER

Having never ridden outside the UK before, Brian, 57, had this to say about the Rainbow Nation: "The changes in scenery since leaving Johannesburg have been amazing, so many contrasts. When you think you've seen every landscape possible, everything changes again – this country is so bloody big! The passes we've ridden through, compared with England or Wales, are huge, yet there can be a dual-carriageway snaking over and through it.

"The roads have generally been a big shock. There are a few that are pot-holed, but 99 per cent have been superb – much better than the UK.

"South Africans have been a big surprise too, everybody has been so friendly and they come across as very genuine and always helpful. I've had no concerns over security. We've been through some small, outlying towns that I wouldn't want to stop in, but I felt fine riding through them.

"I can't find anything negative to say about South Africa – good views and good food at good prices. The accommodation has also been good and the cleanliness can't be faulted. I would love to come back – especially to Cape Town, which is marvellous."



## VERNON BRADBURY



Vernon, 54, is another bike tourer with many miles and many countries under his belt. Including two trips with BT.

"My two weeks of motorbiking in South Africa were a revelation! I expected to be riding across great wide-open landscapes under day after day of azure blue skies. I got that and more...

"We enjoyed great biking roads on smooth surfaces with virtually no traffic for the majority of the tour. Other road users were well-behaved and considerate to us bikers and we had a friendly reception wherever we went.

"The food, wine and beer was also excellent throughout the trip and with the Rand being even weaker than usual the pound represented very good value. In short a perfect winter getaway biking holiday – and no jet-lag!"

## TOP FIVE WEIGHT-SAVING TIPS WHEN PACKING FOR A MOTORCYCLE TOUR



### 1. Get your hair cut

That's right sonny, you! As you can see from the picture above, a close-cropped biker is a happy biker. Forget all your flowing locks nonsense, we're not here to re-enact the formative years of Little Lord Fauntleroy; we're here to ride motorbikes! For those not lucky enough to lose their hair naturally and permanently, clippers can be sourced from Argos for about £15 – so, there you go, you save money on haircuts, too, but don't forget to buy a hat! The money saved can be spent on petroleum spirit.

It's not just that the weight shed from your once effete noggin will allow you to accelerate harder out of bends, or that you've gained something by way of dignity, but you'll also now be able to shed some excess from your wash bag. Out goes the shampoo – you don't need it no more matey. In comes the soap. Yup, good old fashioned soap. It's perfectly good for washing short hair and is the same substance that generations have used to keep their bodies relatively odour-free.

So, that fancy new slimy shower gel can join the shampoo in the bottom of the bin. Maybe the local yaks, rhinos, or whatever will be distressed by the fact that you no longer present the olfactory delights of a summer meadow, oranges and cranberries, or meerkat's nipple. Or maybe they won't.

For those who will now wonder what they should do with any free sachets, or wee bottles of hotel shampoo: you wash yer socks with it – both of them.

### 2. Buy, buy crack sheep

I'm not sure in what decade clothes became 'technical', and people started wearing stuff called 'Engineered Skin', but all this new fangled kit smells of engineered marketing codswallop to me. Worse still, when worn on the trail, where boil-wash machines are not on the cards, it simply smells. More than a day 'wicking' away like a goodun in the same tech-shirt and it'll smell like a baboon's armpit.

Tech takes ages to dry and if you don't dry it fast, again it stinks. A cotton shirt, or a light cotton T-shirt, dries faster and smells better. The wonder material of choice, however, is Merino wool. Made from dear old Mum Nature's high-tech commando favourite, the sheep. God bless it.

You can wear a Merino top for over a week and it won't smell, honest. Two long-sleeved Merinos and a T-shirt of the same and you have a whole clothing system for a fortnight! Long Johns, undercrackers, socks (which do get a little stiff after 3-4 days), all great and they don't itch.

Merino wool garments aren't cheap at some £60 for a quality long-sleever, but considering how good they are on the road, in camp, and what they can save in washing, they have to be something of a baa-gain.

A LIGHT, COMPACT tourer is a happy tourer, who is not going to get stung for a load of wonga over a couple of kilos, only to find him/herself wedged between the plane's porthole and the vast backside of a human/hippo hybrid who weighs more than your bike.

So, get into the weight-loss swing, whether you are cramming your panniers, or heading out for a tour including a luggage-carrying vehicle. In the first instance you'll be a faster packer with less kit and will be riding a happier bike, which you can flick into bends with cavalier abandon – and then pick up with greater ease when gravity abandons you.

Even if there's a bag-truck, you'll have an easier time getting to a tour – and lugging your kit upstairs at 4500m above sea level – if you shave the pounds and keep things neat and compact.

So follow the highly scientific Blazing Trails Guide to Adventure Travel Weight Loss for a lighter life!

### 3. Bin your liners

Most folk these days chose textile clothing for their adventurous motorcycling. And for good reasons – it packs down better, is more flexible in terms of venting, can carry loads of kit in the pockets and is often waterproof with a membrane either carried in the shell, or as a liner. These are fine, of course, and can be useful off-bike in bad weather. What you want to get shot of are any thermal liners. For the amount of extra warmth they offer they are very bulky to pack and conversely, they can be too hot in marginal weather.

So, will you be cold? Of course not, because you have your Merino multi layers and perhaps a thin fleece, so you can fine-tune your temperature control.

### 4. Bank your liquidity

I used to think hydration packs were a bit over-tech and, to use an expression from years gone by, a bit poncey. But this Spring, as Suzie and I were setting off to cross the deserts of Namibia, we picked up a couple of three-litre Camelbacks, as we had nowhere else to store enough water to survive a breakdown.

Hydration systems don't save weight, obviously. But they do keep you neat, stopping you having to try and secure plastic bottles all over the bike (which invariably fall off or puncture on rough roads) and they often have pockets where you can stash essentials, such as bogroll, or cigars. You can stock up on safe fluids wherever available and boost them with rehydration salts to cure that bonfire hangover. When full, they make pretty damn good spine-protectors.

### 5. Dress rehearsals

Before you leave, pack and repack – especially if you are packing for panniers. Few overland riders get it right first time. The instinct is to take what you might need, rather than what you know you need. Ask yourself what you could leave, or do you have a lighter alternative? Are you going to pick up keepsakes along the way?

Five sets of undies, two warm pairs of socks and three cooler pairs. You've got your on-the-bike trousers, two thin and light off-the-bike trousers (one to wear while you wash the other), long johns, three T-Shirts, two shirts, a thermal top or two, maybe a wind-stopper waistcoat. Add a mid-weight fleece to go under your bike jacket and what more clothing could you possibly want? Oh yes – a dressing gown (for Neville).

BLAZING BITS & PIECES



**DON'T GET BIT IN THE ARSE!**

THE RECENT DEMISE of Global Enduro, by far the biggest bike tour operator in the UK, is sad in many ways. The saddest of which is the loss of well over £100,000 to the charities for which tour participants thought they were raising money.

Then there were the lost jobs and disappointed travellers, the vast majority of whom are to have their monies refunded under the ATOL scheme. A few, however will get nothing back and some have lost around £5000. There is not a little bitterness from those booked, who believe Enduro were still taking final payments when they knew they were going into administration.

There is a lesson to be learned here: that if you want your holiday money protected, then you must book with someone who has appropriate bonding. If you are handing over money for a flight, then the person, or company you are handing the money to must have an Air Traffic Organiser's Licence (ATOL). If they do not, then any bonding relating to the 'land only' part of your holiday will become invalid.

If, however (as in the case of those who lost their money to the Enduro collapse), you book a holiday with a company that only holds an ATOL and no bond for land-only holidays,

then you will not be covered unless you take their flights.

Clear? Probably not. It's all ridiculously complicated. Lets try following this checklist:

**IS THERE A FLIGHT INCLUDED IN YOUR TRIP?**

**Yes**

Then whoever is selling you the flight must be ATOL bonded – even if this is an internal flight in a foreign country. If the company selling the flight is not the operator through whom you are booking, then you should be made aware of this up front (with the two separate prices) and you will require separate contracts with the two companies – and will have two claims procedures for the separate elements should things to tits-up.

**No**

The operator must have a recognised form of bonding to cover your holiday in the event of their financial failure.

The big problem in the small scale travel industry right now is not the amount of legislation, but the clarity and enforcement of these laws. There appears to be no department that actively checks that travel companies are operating within the law.

While there are plenty of nice, honest people running small tour companies like ours, stuff happens. People who run companies go bankrupt, get ill, have accidents and die like anyone else. Supplier prices change and currencies swing.

Another thing to check when booking is whether the operator has UK liability insurance in case of a negligence claim. If you are booking with a non-UK outfit check the detail and whether you'll be asked to sign any disclaimers. In many countries disclaimers will undermine your statutory rights.

Hope this helps and that a turd-fest like this never recurs in our industry.

**UPCOMING DEPARTURES**

**June 29th, 2013**

[Ladakh & Zaskar](#) – places available

**July 13th, 2013**

[Leh-Manali](#) – Lots of places available

**August 3rd, 2013**

[Spiti Valley](#) – places available

**September 21st, 2013**

[Spiti Valley](#) – places available

**October 5th, 2013**

[Himalayan Foothills](#) – Tour full

**November 1st, 2013**

[Nepal Tour](#) – Tour full

**November 15th, 2013**

[Nepal Tour](#) – places available

**January 11th, 2014**

[Kerala Tour](#) – places available

**February 15th, 2014**

[Jo'burgh to Cape Town](#) – Now booking

**THANK YOU**

*AND WELL DONE if you've made it this far. We hope you found something of interest.*

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*Safe Riding,*

*Suzie & Damon*

