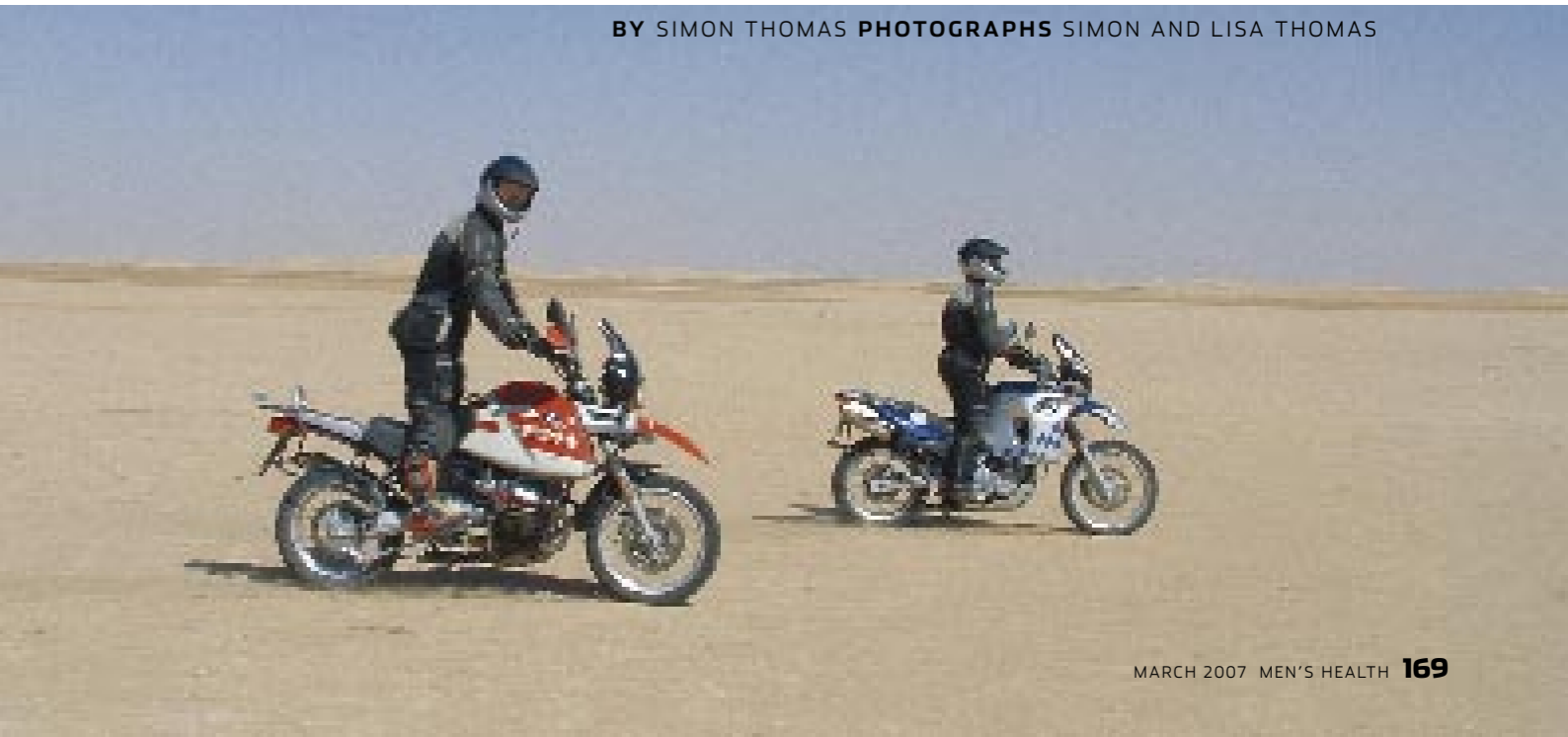


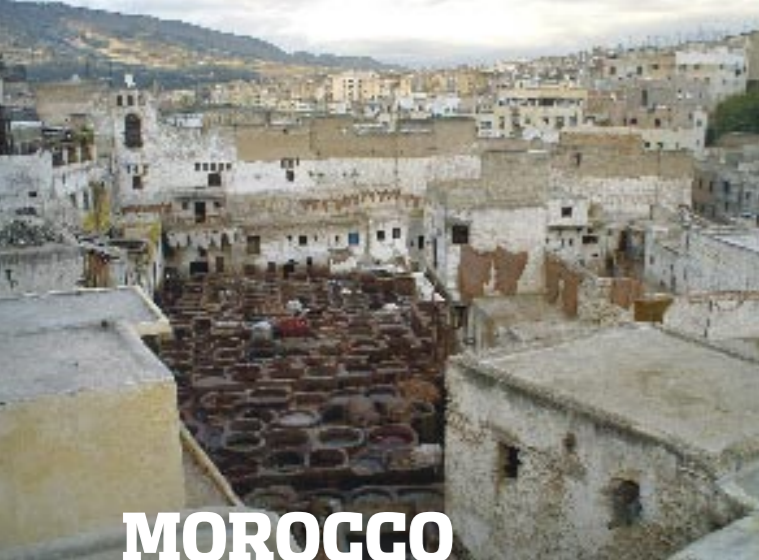
In 2005, we joined a biker couple on their epic journey across Europe. Now, in Part II, we taste the true grit of Africa on the back of their BMWs. Want to ride? Take your directions from this tip sheet



TRANS DANCE

BY SIMON THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHS SIMON AND LISA THOMAS





MOROCCO

THE ROUTE We arrive in Africa at Fes, Morocco, with Cape Town, South Africa our southern destination on this vast continent. It's quite intimidating studying the map and taking in the length of this massive chunk of land. Drive across Africa on a motorbike? Now there's a challenge. Fortunately, our landing in Morocco takes us straight to the main course – the bustling old medina of Fes. This is one of five Imperial cities where our senses are slapped, tickled and generally given a decent shake. It's a busy and ancient town packed with merchants selling everything from electronics to spices in a labyrinth of tightly packed alleyways. The air is fragrant, ancient rugs adorn dusty mud-brick walls and toothless old men squint and smile at us. From Fes we travel south to Casablanca, then south-east to Merzouga to practise our sand riding on Morocco's largest dunes, the Erg Chebbi.

THE COUNTRY From its powerful days as a trade stronghold in the fifth century Roman Empire, through its troubled times during the Berber Wars right up to today, Morocco is steeped in history and yet its proximity keeps it at the edge of global change. Moroccan architecture will leave you awestruck, with its towering 200m tall minaret of the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca (the tallest in the world) or the intricately carved walls of the fortified palaces and desert strongholds.

TRAVEL TIP Women should dress conservatively, covering their legs and shoulders if you want to avoid being hassled.

DON'T MISS Djemaa el-Fna. The vast open square in the heart of Marrakesh. Thousands of people barter and mix, selling and buying nuts, dates and bread among the snake charmers, musicians and dancing nomads all set to a fiery red smoke sky.

STAY HERE The Riad Nora: just inside the medina and a 10-minute walk from Djemaa el-Fna. Address: Riad Nora-112, Derb Sidi Moussa, Riad Zitoune Jdid, Marrakesh-Medina.

SAFETY FACTOR ★★★★★

ROAD QUALITY ★★★★★

A mixture of very good and very bad with not much in-between. Keep your eyes peeled for the wandering livestock.



SENEGAL

THE ROUTE Taking advantage of a little known piste, we detour and cross the border north of Saint Louis. With a swift route taken down the badly pockmarked N2, we pass Louga and Thies before making our new home on the shores of Lac Rose, which hosts the final stage of the Dakar Rally.

THE COUNTRY This is the land of warmth, colour and "gazelles" – the slang name the men give their tall elegant ladies. Senegal is a place of mixed religions, some Christian, some Muslim and a healthy dose of pure African. Like many west African countries, once you leave the relative wealth of the cities you come face to face with the harsh realities of life for the majority of the country. That said, the Senegalese are hospitable and enjoy a wickedly quick sense of humour.

TRAVEL TIP If you're travelling with your own transport, make sure all your vehicle documents are in order. Make sure that your chassis, engine and other identifying numbers are what's written on your documents, otherwise you're easy pickings for the studious local police. Buy the local insurance. It's useless if you want to claim but not having it is another easy money-maker for the cops.

DON'T MISS Lac Rose. A shimmering oasis of pink on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

STAY HERE The Palal has space for your tent and a few small chalets. But if you fancy a few more home comforts then check out the L'Etoile Du Lac Hotel right opposite, offering air-con rooms, swimming pool and the other normal pleasantries. L'Etoile Du Lac, Lac Rose. Phone (00221) 821 5623.

SAFETY FACTOR ★★★★★

ROAD QUALITY ★★★★★

Roads in the north-west are usable, but forget it in the south east: 4x4s and nutty bikers only.



MALI

THE ROUTE "That's a bloody river," yells Lisa. Her concern is justified. The GPS and map list our watery obstacle as a stream. Our only option is to put both our heavy bikes into a small wooden dug-out to cross into Mali. "Well, the bikes are going to drown and our journey comes to a crocodile infested end... or we make it, and have a great story." Luckily the latter rang true.

THE COUNTRY Mali is one of the world's poorest, driest and hottest countries. In spite of this it's still a land of legend. Travelling and watching the daily struggle of most Malians, it's often impossible to grasp that this dusty impoverished country was once the place of empire, and home to continent-changing dynasties whose reign lasted millennia. The fabled city of Timbuktu was once the gateway to the Sahara and if you wanted to move salt or gold along the crucial trade line, you had to pass through it. Timbuktu once homed one of the largest libraries in the world. The ancient Mali Empire has vanished, but traces of its vast cultural legacy are still there. If you're looking for a North African experience, then Mali's the place. Prepared as we were, during one tough leg across country we ran out of water. Severe muscle cramps, hallucinations and kidney problems shortly followed due to dehydration. The lesson: know your route better than just a line on a map.

TRAVEL TIP Avoid travelling across country during February. This is harmattan season, a strong wind, which whips up lingering dust storms brings visibility down to 20m.

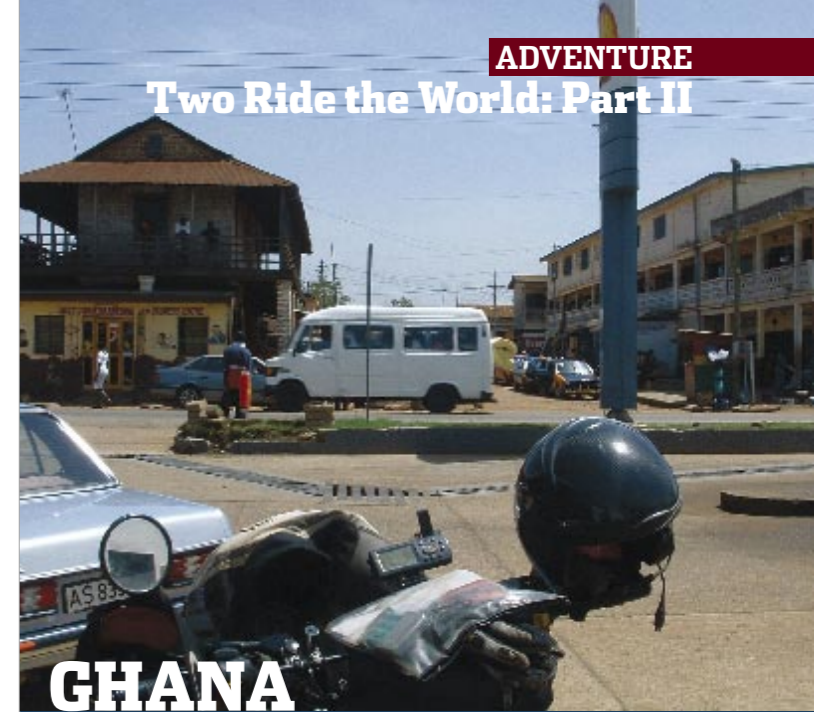
DON'T MISS Mopti and Dogan Country. Mopti boasts the largest mud mosque in Africa, and Dogan Country and the cave cities have to be seen to be believed.

STAY HERE A secure camp in Bamako is hard to find. If you're over-landing by 4x4 or bike, then get yourself here: Mali Lebanese Mission.

SAFETY FACTOR ★★★

ROAD QUALITY ↘

What roads? We only saw three tarred roads in Mali. Each was in pretty poor shape and started only 15km out from Mali's capital Bamako.



GHANA

THE ROUTE By the time we slide, drop and skid our way to the Ghanaian border our bodies are paying the price for the last few months. The dream of Accra, Ghana's bright breezy capital, lures our bruised bodies south. The route isn't elaborate... south, south. The smooth tarred N5 gives us the chance to make some distance, but the roadside litter of burnt out and overturned cars, trucks and buses lays testament to the ever present danger of relaxing.

THE COUNTRY Aside from the lush tropical jungle and monumental architecture in Accra, Ghana's greatest natural resource is its people – whose company is as easy to enjoy as the ice-cold coconut milk you'll drink on the coast.

TRAVEL TIP Choose your travel means carefully; in spite of good roads the condition of 95 percent of all the vehicles including public transport is absolutely horrendous. If possible get yourself a taxi and if you're not happy with it, don't get in; wait for another.

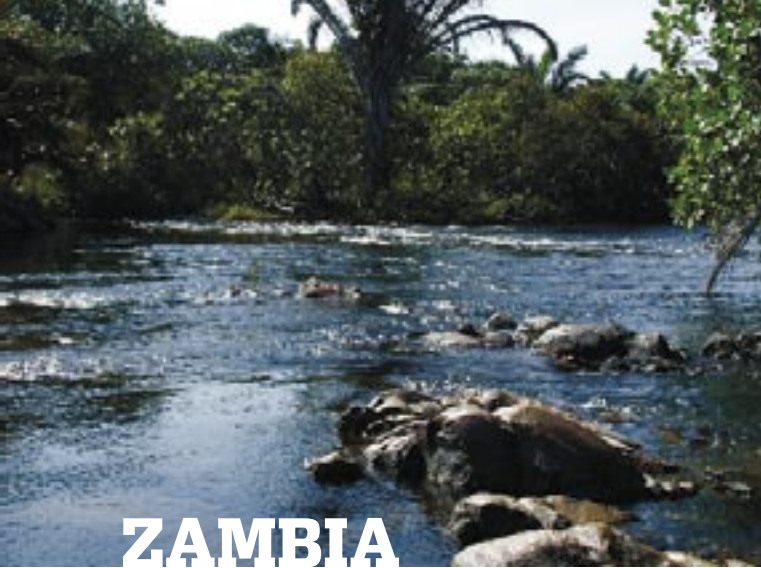
DON'T MISS The hustle and bustle of Accra: women balancing impossible loads atop their heads; hand-painted beer ads shout; sellers dice with death, rushing up to cars plying anything from handcrafted jewellery to second-hand AA batteries; and overloaded outdoor markets selling chickens and underwear spill out onto highways. It's a colourful, frantic jumble that somehow works, but God knows how.

STAY HERE The Lemon Lodge: not as bad as its name may imply, it has seven basic double rooms with cement floors, double beds, private baths and ceiling fans, which go at a good price. Address: 2nd Mango Tree Avenue. Phone: (00233) 21 227 857.

SAFETY FACTOR ★★★★★

ROAD QUALITY ★★★★★

The main roads are good quality asphalt but the accident rate is exceptionally high due to poor vehicle maintenance.



ZAMBIA

THE ROUTE Having travelled through Namibia and Botswana, and with memories of elephant charges and feeding lion cubs still fresh in our minds, we manhandle our heavy motorbikes onto the rickety looking pontoon that will carry us across the Chobe River and into Zambia. Thoroughly soaked and mesmerised in equal proportion by Victoria Falls, we ride the T2, The Great North Road, and strike out for Tanzania.

THE COUNTRY Lusaka is a hard and unforgiving place, where the fortunate few with their sleek European cars hide from the hardship behind darkened windscreens. The poverty on the north side of town is reminiscent of what we saw in southern Morocco and even Mali.

TRAVEL TIP Avoid Lusaka and the other larger cities and get yourself into the country.

DON'T MISS Kapishya Hot Springs. Manicured grounds lie neatly next to the fast flowing river that also runs past the bottom of the small campsite. Crystal clear water bubbles at a steady 45°C, maintained by the active fissures lying deep below. The hot pool nestling back into the emerald vegetation is picture perfect.

STAY HERE Shiwa Ngandu (www.shiwangandu.com). It offers a handful of wooden chalets and no more than a dozen places for camping, and neighbours the Kapishya Hot Springs. This is not on the tourist route and you won't find it in the travel guidebooks, yet. A small and undiscovered oasis, it is situated on the Estate of Shiwa Ngandu (The Africa House) 32km off the Great North Road. The turn-off is clearly signposted on the 86km peg, north of Mpika.

SAFETY FACTOR ★★★

ROAD QUALITY ★★★

The main T2 is reasonably good and no problem for a normal car, however, you'll need a 4x4 if you really want to explore.



KENYA

THE ROUTE Crossing the smaller border at Namanga we ride due north for Nairobi. We spend a few days in the capital and then Nyahururu, the highest town in Kenya before turning west to visit Lake Baringo.

THE COUNTRY We drink coffee from metal mugs and watch an aqua marine sky turn deep blue as the sun rises. The occasional plume of wispy smoke blows over us, caught by the breeze from the embers of last night's fire. In the distance a young bull elephant expertly strips the branches of a tree. Kenya has us mesmerised. Kenya is well set up to support its still increasing tourism industry, but it's also one of the most expensive, often charging non-nationals two to three times more for everything.

TRAVEL TIP Shop around. If you're planning any type of excursion, large or small, get at least three separate quotes; you'll be amazed at how much the prices will differ. If you can, go on recommendation.

DON'T MISS Kenya's Rift Valley, an escarpment with unparalleled geographical features. The people of the Rift Valley are a meshwork of different tribal identities and where the Masai people, Kenya's international cultural symbol, hail from.

STAY HERE Thompson Falls Lodge: in Kenya's highest town Nyahururu right by the falls. Location: by road from Nakuru to the west (one hour), or Nanyuki to the east (two hours). The lodge is located one kilometre off the main road. Phone: (00254) (0365) 22006.

SAFETY FACTOR ★★★★★

ROAD QUALITY ★★

Dissappointingly the main roads are badly potholed. We got off the beaten track and enjoyed far better travelling on the secondaries.



Two Ride the World: Part II



TANZANIA

THE ROUTE In the last five kilometres leading up to the border between Zambia and Tanzania the police stops increase. We are stopped at every one. The border is relative chaos. Huge trucks park and block the way, vendors selling everything run across the road, livestock meanders around dazed but unimpressed while two motorcyclists try to make their way through the middle. An officer dressed in impractical white, frowns and waves us through the rusting yellow barrier. And then on to the endless A7 – a long, straight section of tar disappearing into the distant scrub on a blurred horizon. We are aiming for Dar es Salaam.

THE COUNTRY Tanzania is a country just begging to be explored. From the thin air of Africa's highest point on top of Kilimanjaro across the Indian Ocean to Zanzibar. More than anywhere else on Africa's East Coast, the rich Persian/Arab influence can be felt here in Zanzibar. Cinnamon, cumin, ginger, pepper and cardamom are heavy in the fragrant air and small, domed mosques lie just waiting to be found down shadow-filled alleyways and smooth stone pavements, rounded with footsteps trod over centuries.

TRAVEL TIP If you're off to explore Zanzibar, consider one of the small charter flights, you'll be surprised at the low prices compared with the ferry. Unless really pushed for cash avoid the cheap over-night ferry; 22 hours of cramped confinement, animal shit and body odour... you get the idea.

DON'T MISS Kilimanjaro. Even if you can't climb it, just seeing it is like looking at a raised, clenched fist: a powerful image of Africa.

STAY HERE On the island of Zanzibar: Kendwa Rocks. Phone: (00255) 774 415 475, www.kendwarocks.com. On the mainland: Marangu Hotel on the foothills of Kilimanjaro. Phone: (00255) 27 275 6594. E-mail: info@maranguhotel.com.

SAFETY FACTOR ★★★

ROAD QUALITY ★★★

Around Dar es Salaam you'll love the new tar, the rest requires concentration.



MALAWI

THE ROUTE With Lake Malawi running the length of the country, most journeys in this small but engaging country run south to north and vice versa. Religiously tolerant, inexpensive and with an atmosphere laid back to the point of falling over. You're going to love this country.

THE COUNTRY How can you not love a county with a water park bang in the middle and a national beer (Kuchi-Kuchi) that tastes like a premium lager and is two rand a litre? Much like Ghana, Malawi's big attraction – apart from the easy living – is its people. Among the poorest, they are also the most generous and the warmest.

TRAVEL TIP Swimming in Lake Malawi is generally safe but the lake does have bilharzia, so avoid swimming in small inlets or stagnant water.

DON'T MISS The islands of Lake Malawi. Feel like Robinson Crusoe as you lounge about on Mumbo or Domwe islands surrounded by the first freshwater marine reserve in the world. Go to www.africanadrenalin.com.

STAY HERE Steps Camp and Hotel at Senga Bay. The sheltered campsite is right on the beach. If you fancy going upmarket, the hotel is five-star with all the usual comforts. Or why not simply camp and enjoy the hotel's services... the best of both worlds.

SAFETY FACTOR ★★★★★

ROAD QUALITY ★★★

Surprisingly good.

MH

