

2 RIDE THE
WORLD

TRANSFORMING

INTO A Lifestyle



Simon plays with power slides in the soft sands of west India.

A JOURNEY

by Simon Thomas |
Photos by Simon &
Lisa Thomas

“What?! You’ve been traveling for 14 months? That’s incredible!” squawked the robust man behind me, as we stood waiting in line at *WalMart*.

“No, not months, 14 years,” I replied, which immediately resulted in a noteworthy pause in the flow of his words.

“That’ll be \$32.49,” said the cashier, ending the awkward pause. I handed over the cash and headed to the parking lot. Pondering our interaction made me wonder: Do Lisa and I now take how long we’ve been traveling as “normal”? The conclusion I’ve come to is, yes! Our journey and its constant challenges have come to define us, it’s just what we do. Anyone could do the same if they chose, couldn’t they?

We’ve been riding and exploring the world longer than most. Having closed the front door to our home, we set off back in May, 2003. Since then, almost 500,000 miles have rolled under our wheels; we’ve ridden deserts, mountain ranges and, during this time, reinvented ourselves in the process.

Over the years we’ve watched as other riders announced their own record-setting ADV rides via websites and social media, only to read months or sometimes years later, in lesser-trumpeted postings, that their journeys were over and their wheels had stopped rolling.

All this begs the question: Why are we still on the road? And, more importantly, what are we doing differently that allows us to stay on the road? Here are a few things that may allow you to travel farther or longer than you might have imagined possible.

1. Confirm What You Want From Your Journey

What’s your reason? Career break, personal growth, the challenge of it, or to simply experience the freedom that travel can provide?

There’s no wrong reason to travel. We’ve all heard that “Travel is the cure for bigotry and ignorance,” so no matter the reason for your venture into a previously unknown state, country, or continent, if you end up a better you, then it’s a win.

However, before you head out on your quest, be honest with yourself about your genuine motivation to travel. You’ll end up with far more realistic expectations, which in turn will dramatically improve and enhance how you feel about what you experience along the way.

2. Write a Diary or Blog

I'd never written a diary until we began our journey. And, if I'm honest, I don't write for the readers that follow us, I write for me.

What I've found is that writing a diary forces me to filter and hone my memories and relive them. Each relived moment becomes a little more etched in my memory, more powerful and in focus. In doing so, small but critical details of a day or a month can be remembered with incredible clarity.

Today, I appreciate my clear recollections of extraordinary rides, or of the remarkable people we've met along the way, fueling my passion to collect more moments and experiences. Without clear and meaningful memories, it's all too easy to lose perspective and to begin taking travel for granted. The moment you become blasé about traveling, it's time to stop.



Lisa takes time to talk with a Mongolian woman in the Gobi Desert.

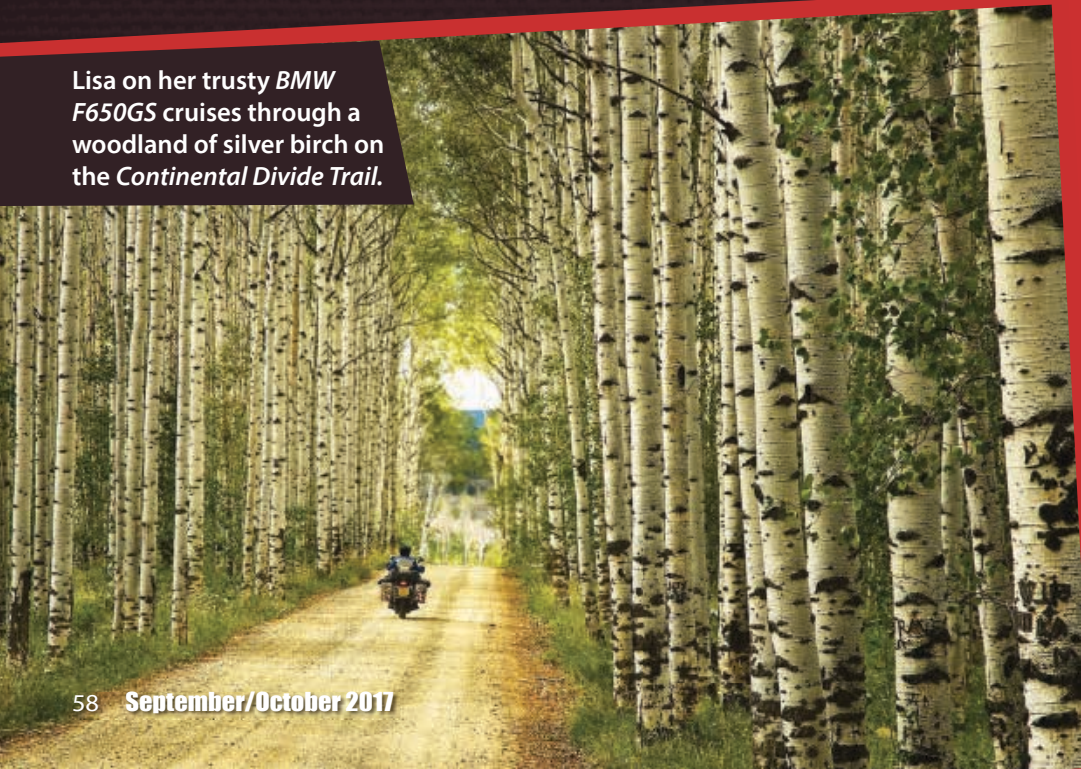
3. Personal Growth

Many of us would like to be better or smarter versions of ourselves. But, personal growth takes commitment. Recognizing and seizing opportunities play a big part in how long you can, or even want, to stay out on the road. Take a memory snapshot of who you are and the skills you have before you set out and compare them to the person you are six months into your time on the road. You'll be surprised how far you've come, and how quickly. Today, Lisa and I speak four or five languages between us. We're more linguistically enthusiastic than we are fluent, but these are skills learned on the road. Having a second or even third language under your belt can open incredible professional opportunities when it's time to head home, too.

4. Great Gear Improves Your Standard of Living

Start out with good gear, or at least the best gear you can afford. Your tent, camping gear, and the items you carry with you will ultimately define your standard of living and how comfortable you feel. Being tired and dirty 24/7 is going to kill the passion you felt when setting out. Another tried and true rule is that every item you carry should serve at least two purposes. A dinner plate, for example, can also be a Frisbee and a dish for collecting the nuts and bolts when servicing your bike.

Lisa on her trusty BMW F650GS cruises through a woodland of silver birch on the Continental Divide Trail.



5. Know Where Everything Is

We've learned the hard way that one of the biggest chores when traveling is the daily grind of the unpack, camp, repack scenario. More travelers complain about this than almost anything else.

Develop an efficient system, and eventually the process will become second nature to the point where your mind will be off solving other problems while your body deals with the mechanics of unloading your bags, pumping up the mattress, and erecting the tent.

6. Travel Slowly

Of all the ideas discussed in this article, traveling slowly may be the most important, as it affects your traveling budget, sanity and energy levels.

Speeding from point A to point B requires efficiency and convenience, and outside the U.S. these are often rare commodities. Much of the world turns slowly, especially in developing countries, where life has an altogether different pace, and smooth, efficient service can be rare. If you want to travel quickly, you'll probably end up handing over your hard-saved cash in order to buy the efficiency and convenience you think you need.

Traveling more slowly also gives you the chance to stop earlier in the day, find the most economical accommodations, and cook your own meals, all of which saves money. And, you'll have the chance to explore the areas in which you're traveling, get to know the local people and connect in a meaningful way, instead of just subscribing to the check-box syndrome of "Been there, done that, check!" If you want to learn anything from your travels, you need to connect, talk, listen, and pause. You'll be far richer for it.

7. Have a Set of Clear Goals

Although our route looks like a drunken spider crawled across the map, there's a method to our madness. Today our goals are the same as when we set out. We want to ride 122 countries and all seven continents from the most northerly to the most southerly point of each. Admittedly, it's taken longer than we'd anticipated.

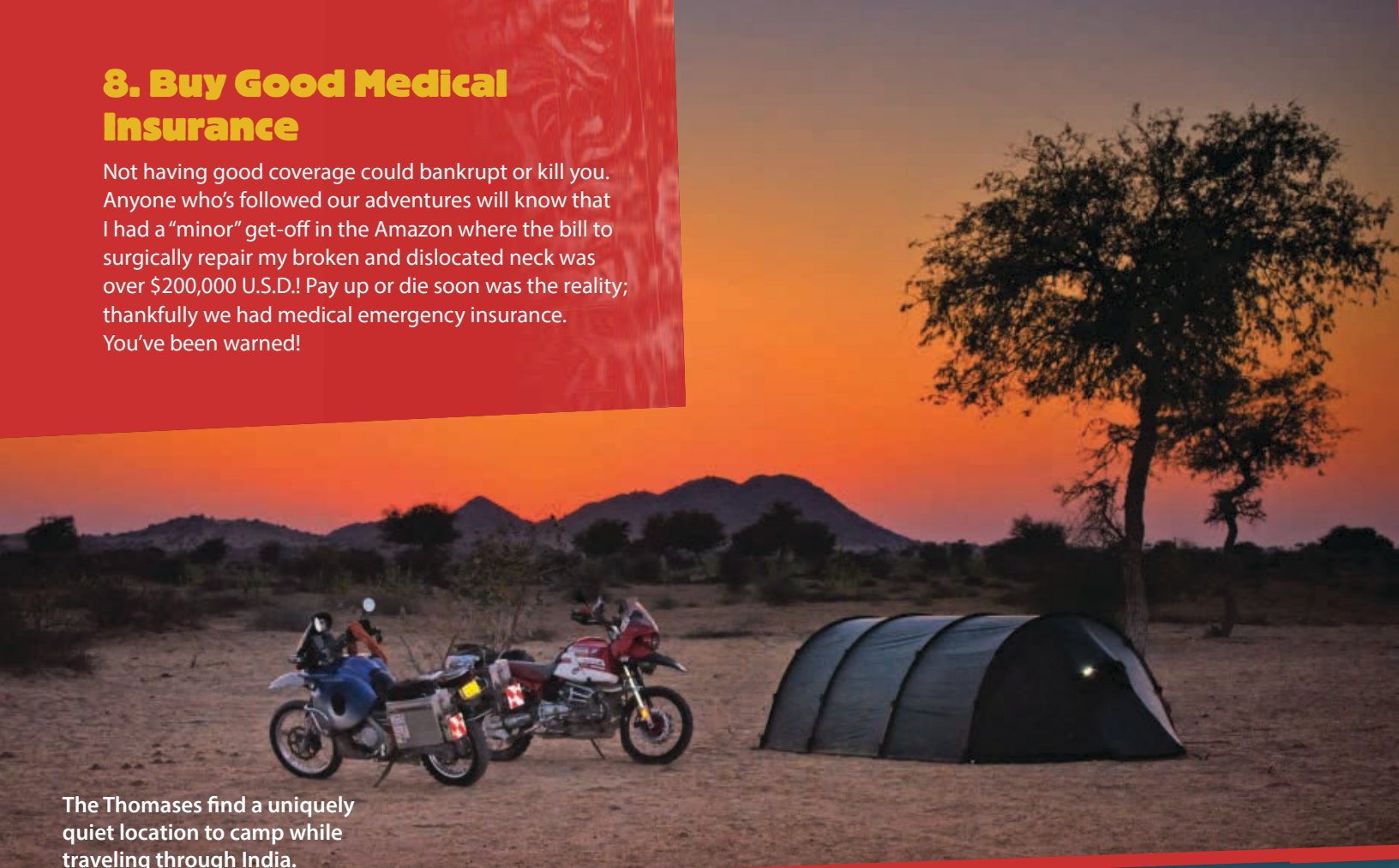
Having a set of goals or a focus for your journey gives it boundaries and perspective. Moreover, although many of us ride for the sense of freedom, having a goal or a destination provides a level of purpose that we've found crucial to our staying on the road. For us, knowing that we're riding to reach a destination gives context through which we can interpret the experiences along the way. Mindless meandering would be fun for a while but it would be easy to lose your way and end up taking your journey for granted.

Simon and Lisa take a moment to celebrate reaching the *Árbol de Piedra* ("rock tree"), high in the Bolivian Altiplano.



8. Buy Good Medical Insurance

Not having good coverage could bankrupt or kill you. Anyone who's followed our adventures will know that I had a "minor" get-off in the Amazon where the bill to surgically repair my broken and dislocated neck was over \$200,000 U.S.D.! Pay up or die soon was the reality; thankfully we had medical emergency insurance. You've been warned!



The Thomases find a uniquely quiet location to camp while traveling through India.

9. Money

There's no getting away from the fact that money makes the world go 'round. To stay out on the road you're either going to need to be independently wealthy or find a way to generate revenue while on the road.

The internet offers plenty of opportunities to generate income, if you're willing to think outside the box. You may have to learn and perfect new skills or simply work harder or smarter than you ever have before. However, traveling doesn't always come cheap and sometimes it's just about doing what you have to so you can continue doing what you want to!

Don't expect to make a living writing for magazines. More and more travelers are offering up articles to publishers who are paying less.

It's far more effort than it appears at first glance, but if you have the discipline to sit and write every day, then you could publish a book on your travels. But remember, after the initial pipeline of friends and family, if you aren't prepared to actively market your book, sales will be scant at best.

Also consider selling commercial licenses for your images or video clips.

Look to minimize your monthly payments back home. If you're making monthly payments on a mortgage, ask your lender to switch you to an "interest only" scheme before you head out on your journey. This will significantly reduce your monthly bills and give you more cash with which to travel.

At the base of one of Ecuador's live volcanoes, Simon and Lisa take nothing for granted.



10. Take Nothing for Granted

I know this one sounds obvious, but as I indicated above, traveling can be exhausting and it's easy to lose perspective. So, give yourself the privilege of living in the moment. Make sure you allow time every day to appreciate and enjoy the experiences that your efforts, sacrifice, and determination have earned you. From the smallest gesture of kindness to the grandest offers of support, the people that you meet on the road will surprise, delight, and humble you. Enjoy the ride and take nothing for granted. The world owes you nothing. **ADV**



Simon and Lisa Thomas are considered by many to be the world's foremost adventure motorcyclists, with more real-world experience than anyone on the road today! They've ridden their way into a life that most of us can only imagine. Since setting out on their journey in 2003, the duo has so far amassed a whopping

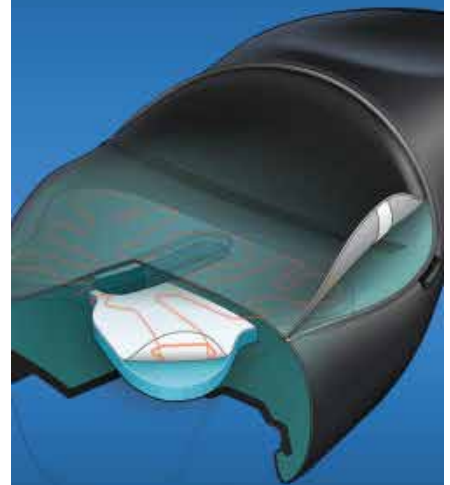
*500,000 miles on their ride, through 78 countries on six continents. Along the way they've traversed 27 deserts, survived a broken neck in the Amazon, cheated death and are still traveling today. It's easy to say that Lisa and Simon helped define what we now call "Adventure Riding." As explorers, writers, photographers and public speakers this pair inspire adventure. **2RidetheWorld.com***



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