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The Motorcycle Diaries

Morgan Parker took the road less travelled on his quest for a better world

WORDS BY WENSHAN PANG

It took many by surprise when Parker gave up his comfortable position as the president of a real-estate company to embark on a perilous cross-continental expedition spanning 25,000 km and 10 countries—and on a motorbike—but that was a sacrifice the father of an 8-year-old was willing to make.

"I wanted to find a way to be more strategic in my philanthropy," Parker explained. "Instead of writing cheques each year, I want to visit the organisations, meet the principals and understand the issues more comprehensively."

Parker runs Wheel2Wheel, a non-profit establishment which endeavours to raise awareness and provide financial assistance to under-recognised charities throughout Australasia. "We aim to

present a group of well-researched and thoughtful group of organisations to our community of potential donors."

GEARING UP

In March, after bidding adieu to his

corporate suits, the Hong Kong-based Australian slipped on a biker jacket and began an adventure that took him from Hong Kong to his hometown Brisbane. The purpose of the journey was to visit a charity organisation supported by Wheel2Wheel in each of the ten countries he visited.

"Our team spent almost two years researching hundreds of different establishments in the ten countries I'll be passing through," Parker shared. "We select small, grass-root organisations which tackle a key issue affecting both the country and the region, led by inspiring individuals."

For Malaysia, Parker was looking for a cause that his team could connect with on a personal level. That they found in the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO). One of the team members, having lost her cousin due to domestic violence four years ago, encouraged the team to underscore women's right issues.

"WAO exceeded every criterion we set for selection. After meeting them and witnessing their passion, it was clear that we had made the right choice," said Parker. "Despite its prevalence, violence against women has always been swept

under the carpet. We are helping WAO to draw attention to this issue and to provide victims an access to their legal rights."

WAO was not the only thing that Parker found impressive in Malaysia when he made a pit stop here a couple of months back. His stay here was also an immensely enjoyable one. Although he lamented the insane traffic in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia ranks the top of his list from a riding perspective.

"The road quality is fantastic, the

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driving is sensible, motorcycles are treated with respect and the scenery is stunning,” Parker enthused. The team rode into Malaysia via Thailand and visited Penang, Cameron Highlands and Malacca prior to arriving in Kuala Lumpur. “We even had a spectacular ride to Genting Highlands with Malaysia’s BMW Owner’s Club.”

ON THE ROAD

The star of the expedition is undoubtedly the bike itself—a BMW F800S. Ironically, until four years ago Parker didn’t even know how to ride a motorcycle.

“I have many friends who ride and speak passionately about the wonderful sense of freedom they feel when they’re riding,” shared Parker. It piqued his interest and he became intrigued with the idea of exploring the world from the saddle of a motorcycle, oblivious of what lies ahead.

“It’s such a respite from a monotonous life. I’m delighted that motorcycles are a central element to Wheel2Wheel because there’s an enormous interest in motorcycles across Asia. Whenever I stop during my expedition, a crowd of local people quickly gathers. This gives me the perfect footing to start talking about Wheel2Wheel and my journey.”

Parker’s journey has been, according to him, “epic and the stories abound”. His 100-day adventure covered some of the most beautiful but at times, hostile terrains in Asia.

“The most poignant memories are always the people you meet along the way. I’ve been overwhelmed at the kindness and hospitality given to me in each and every country I’ve visited. People are genuinely interested in what I’m doing which still amazes me,” he reminisced.

Unfortunately, with more than 12 hours on the saddle, six hours processing online content, doing laundry and charging electronic devices, there wasn’t much time for Parker to relax and sight-see.

“The most challenging aspects of the expedition were managing the equipments, my diet and my sleep on a daily basis,” he said.

And it must have been hard to maintain concentration for hours on end while braving through poor road conditions and unpredictable weather conditions.

“It’s vital to remain on-guard at all times. One moment of distraction can easily lead to a disastrous outcome,” Parker stated. “The distance I need to travel each day is long. I need to keep on moving all the time and I continually have to push my limits regardless of the circumstances.”

Even after experiencing hypothermia, following 16-days of continuous rain in China, Parker remained undaunted in his quest to complete his journey.

FINAL DESTINATION

“Creating a non-profit organisation is no different to building a good business—it’s all about the people. However, it’s more difficult as the currency used here is their passionate, selfless contribution,” Parker shared. Not to mention finding people who are willing to do this over a long period of time.

Fortunately, Wheel2Wheel has formed a strong fleet of people who are committed to sharing their skills and experiences with the team. “We all share a common vision of trying to make a positive difference in the world. And ultimately, that’s what binds us together,” he said.

Wheel2Wheel has already begun to develop the concept for its second expedition, planned to be rolled out in two years’ time. “Personally, I shall return to my career to enable me to continue funding Wheel2Wheel’s activities so all donations we receive go directly to the organisations we support,” said Parker.

“There are many people in the world who are focused on their own social-economic progression—I used to be one of them,” Parker laughed. One of his objectives in creating Wheel2Wheel is to speak to those people and show them a way of making philanthropy fun and integral to their own ambitions—to combine something they love to do with a broader purpose.

“I have faith that people out there want to help. They are just searching for a way. Hopefully Wheel2Wheel provides an avenue or an example for them to follow.” ☺

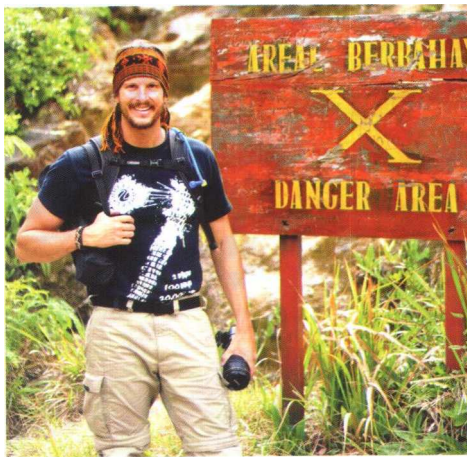
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Parker in a rice paddy in East Java, Indonesia



Parker and the founders of Child's Dream, a non-profit organisation which dedicates to empowering marginalised children and youth in the Mekong Sub-Region

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Day 56 of his expedition, Parker and his team arrived in Penang



Parker at the Borobudur Temple