



Tushar, Prasad and Sanjay (left to right) at their flag-off from India Gate.



Elephants graze in abundance at Masai Mara, Kenya.



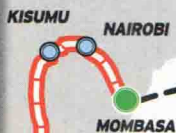
Shaking a leg with the local dancers in Zimbabwe.



India



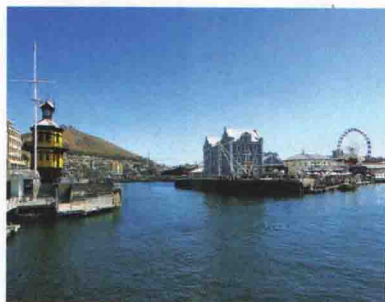
Kuala Lumpur's iconic Petronas Towers.



THE GREAT INDIAN WORLD TRIP - PART ONE

"AAGEY SE LEFT!"

Three men are on an epic road trip around the world. **Tushar Agarwal** shares the trio's experiences on navigating across Asia, Australia and Africa without any electronic aids.



Waterfront in Cape Town, South Africa.

We'd set seven official entries in the Limca Book of Records, and it was absolutely clear what we had to do next. Sanjay Madan, D Prasad and I made up the team, and we put into action our long-standing dream of driving around the world. It was time to go on the mother of all road journeys – The Great Indian World Trip.

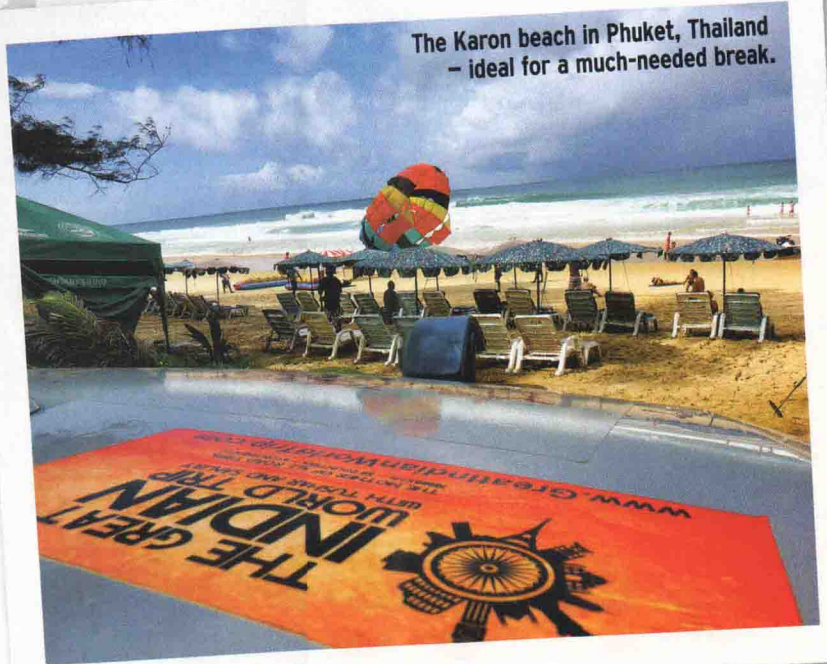
We added a unique element to our expedition: no GPS, no

sat-nav. We would use road maps, read road signs and ask people for directions. We wanted to lose our way, talk to the locals, find ourselves in unplanned situations and come home with interesting stories.

After months of planning, D-Day finally arrived. Wearing our crisp yellow World Trip t-shirts, amidst huge applause, we flagged off the greatest adventure of our lives from India Gate, Delhi. The four-day journey to the India-Myanmar border found us gorging on *tunde* kebabs in Lucknow, visiting indigo plantations in Forbesganj (a small town in Bihar) and having our senses challenged at a food market in Nagaland where dog meat, live



Shwedagon pagoda is regarded as the most beautiful one in Myanmar, and rightly so.



The Karon beach in Phuket, Thailand – ideal for a much-needed break.

PENANG ISLAND

SINGAPORE

DARWIN

BROOME

QUEENSLAND

ALICE SPRINGS

BRISBANE

PERTH

NEW SOUTH WALES

ADELAIDE

MELBOURNE

Australia



Kangaroo- and Emu-crossing signs dot the Australian highways.



A golden landscape at Broome, Australia's popular beach town.



Road trains rather than a rail network, in Australia.

frogs, bee larvae, eel and lots of other exotic cuisine was up for sale. We finally drove through Manipur, crossed the Indo-Myanmar Friendship bridge and entered the first foreign country on our journey.

MYANMAR

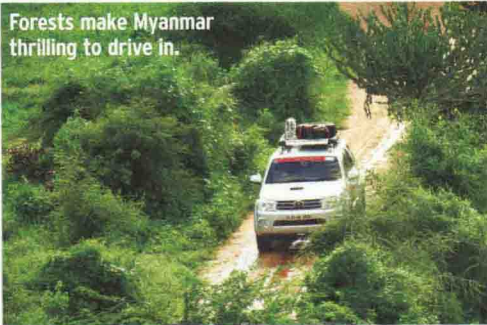
“To travel is to discover that everyone is wrong about other countries.” The more I travel, the more I believe in Huxley’s dictum. Our co-ordinator in Myanmar, Tin, an ex-army officer who also served as the Director General at the Ministry of Tourism, not only made border crossing very smooth for us, but also escorted us in his patrol vehicle through our nine-day drive across the country. We were grateful since we soon discovered that there are no road signs or markings to guide travellers. Instead, there are dense forests, mountains, dirt roads, sunken, rickety old bridges and thousands of temples from thousands of years ago. On our very first day through a country that’s 50 percent forestland, enroute to Kalay, we crossed an astounding 42 iron bridges within a 100km range.

Now, what’s a road trip without a bit of a challenge? The drive from Kalay to Monywa put our skills to the test — driving through slush, gravel and rocks over hilly terrain. And to top it all, it was raining! Somewhere along the way, we hit a really soft patch and our car tilted about 40 degrees into the slush. It took two hours, every ounce of driving skill we had and considerable luck to get out and continue. We drove to Bagan the next morning, an 11th-century historic town, home to 4,446 temples, pagodas and monasteries. Climb atop one of them, and you’re greeted with a surreal view of thousands of ancient monuments stretching out in every direction. We then took the recently constructed

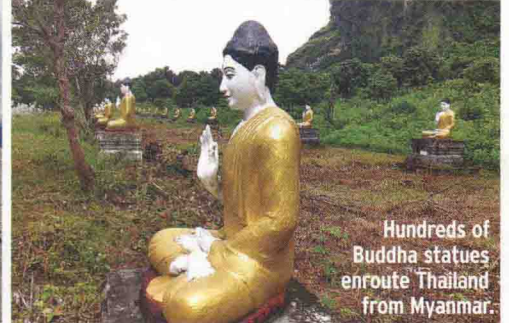
Climb atop any pagoda in the 11th-century town of Bagan, and you'll see ancient monuments in every direction.



Forests make Myanmar thrilling to drive in.



A fisherman strikes a pose at Inle, Myanmar's second-largest lake.



Hundreds of Buddha statues enroute Thailand from Myanmar.

Mandalay-Yangon expressway, an eight-lane highway to Yangon that's on par with any of the best international highways. As we neared the Myanmar-Thailand border, we couldn't help but reflect on the last few days. People in Myanmar are always smiling, the country is very clean, there's good food everywhere, and most people chew tobacco – but they respect their land enough to never spit on the roads.

THAILAND

Everything was different here: different buildings, language, trees, roads, food, smells, everything. Since our local contact couldn't show up, we headed towards Bangkok with only sign boards and our compass to guide us, and somehow made it right to our hotel.

We were told Thailand has something for everyone. With silken-smooth highways and fantastic road discipline, we found exactly what we needed to make our drive ideal. We covered about 900km in a single day – a feat impossible on Indian roads. After unwinding at Phuket's beaches for a couple of days, we hit the road again before we got too comfortable lazing by the crystal-blue waters of the Andaman Sea.

MALAYSIA

What is it that everyone looks for on a cross-border road trip? Food? Sights? Planning? Documentation? Currency? After years of

All you need is access to a country, and everything else falls into place.

travel, I have come to realise that all you need is access to the country, and everything else falls into place. What is a road trip without a bit of apprehension, a bit of uncertainty?

We entered Malaysia sans any road maps, local currency or a clue on how to get to Penang. Foolhardy, maybe, but it led to one of our best experiences. Sanglee, an Indian-Malaysian who befriended us at the border, helped us with the border-crossing paperwork, and even took care of the food and arranged a local guide for us. The Automobile Association of Malaysia (AAM) also extended invaluable support; T K Malhotra, president of Automobile Association of Upper

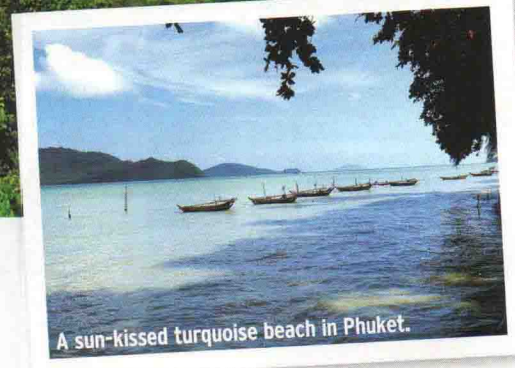
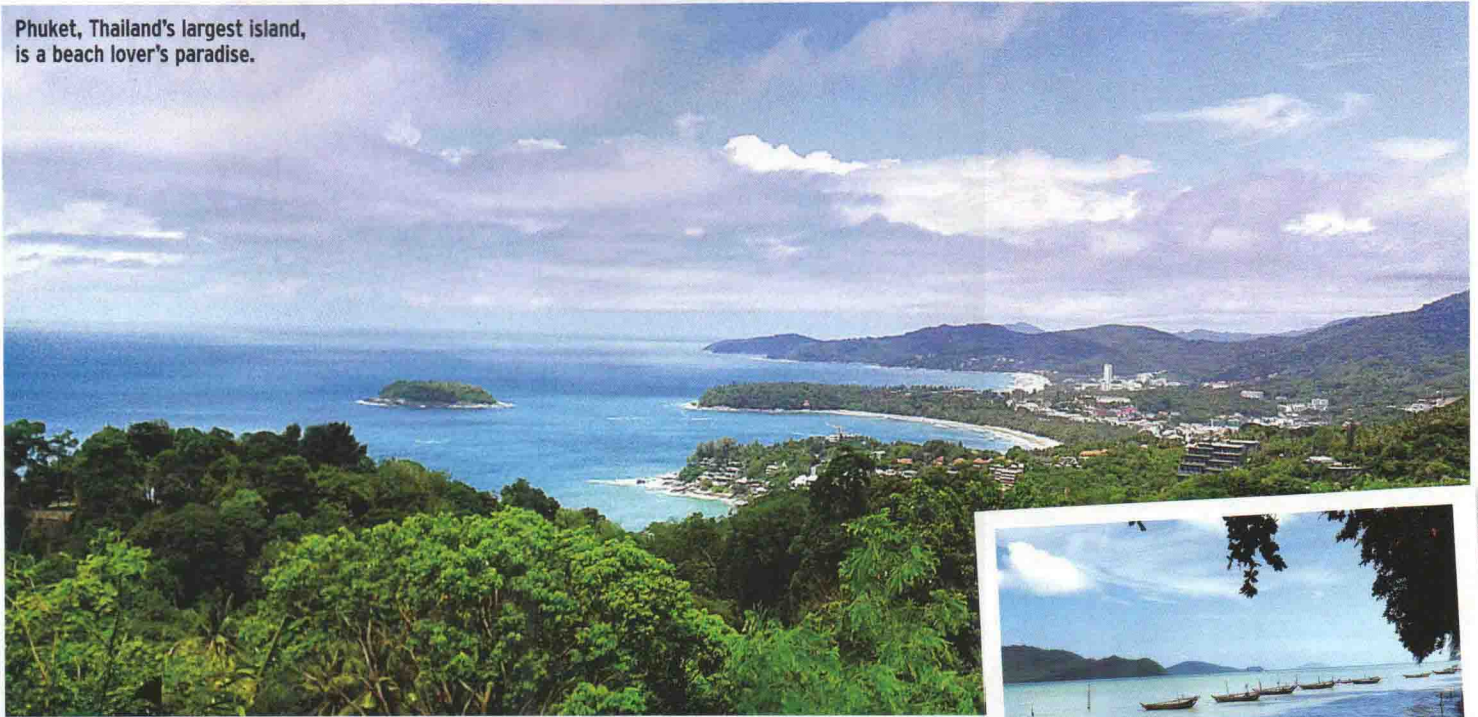


Beehives are a delicacy in Myanmar.



Snakes, eels, frogs, dog meat are local fare in Nagaland.

Phuket, Thailand's largest island, is a beach lover's paradise.



A sun-kissed turquoise beach in Phuket.

India (AAUI) had written to them about us. Not only did AAM get our car fully serviced at their workshop, they even got us onto NTV7, the national news channel for Malaysia.

SINGAPORE

It was now time to enter the final country on our itinerary for Asia, Singapore. It turned out to be the most difficult and expensive country to obtain driving permits from – we spent close to US\$ 250 for getting a plethora of documents to drive in the country only for a day! Across the border, a maze of roads, highways and flyovers opened up in front of us. Now the challenge was to make sure we didn't take too many wrong turns or break any laws. We didn't! As planned, we managed to navigate using only road maps. As we drove to Jurong Port to board the ship to Australia, we thought about our experiences over the last 25 days and wondered what was next.

Driving permits in Singapore cost close to US\$ 250 for a single day.



AUSTRALIA

Australia greeted us with a strict quarantine check for the car at Darwin port, which involved a detailed examination for any trace of mud, seeds, insects or any other biodegradable stuff. We failed. The officer found some mud stuck near the chassis; the windscreen wash container was broken, and the car's battery was dead. We were only able to hit the road and experience the Australian Outback a week later.

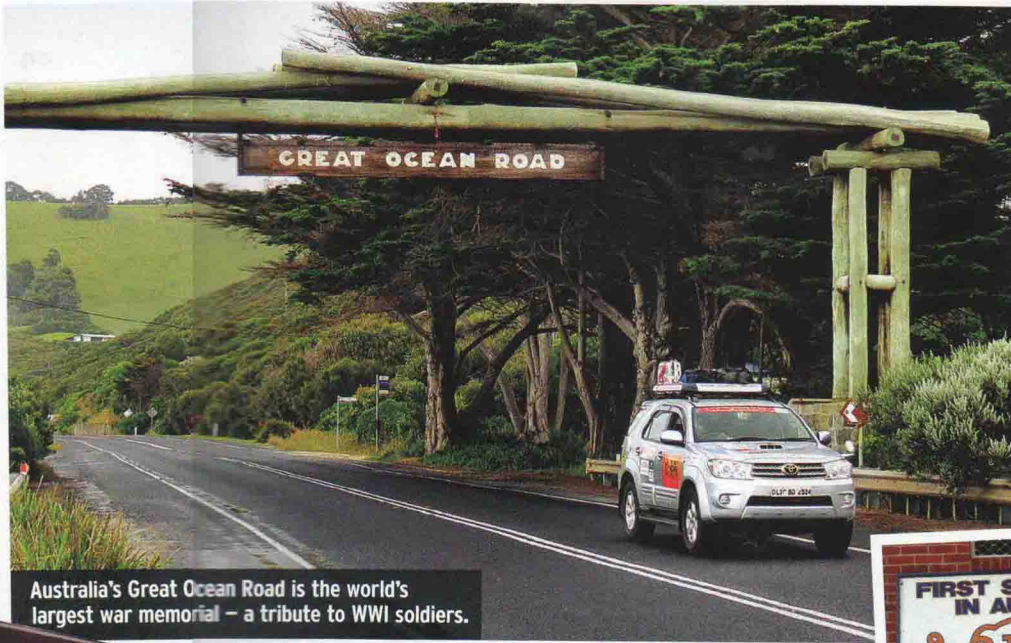
We started off on Stuart Highway, also known as 'The Track'. Surrounded by a desolate, brown, barren and rugged desert landscape, it's a movie-esque road which appears to head straight into the horizon. The small towns that we passed, however, more than made up for the monotony. There's Wycliffe Well, also called the UFO capital of Australia due



Road signs were our only ally enroute to Bangkok.



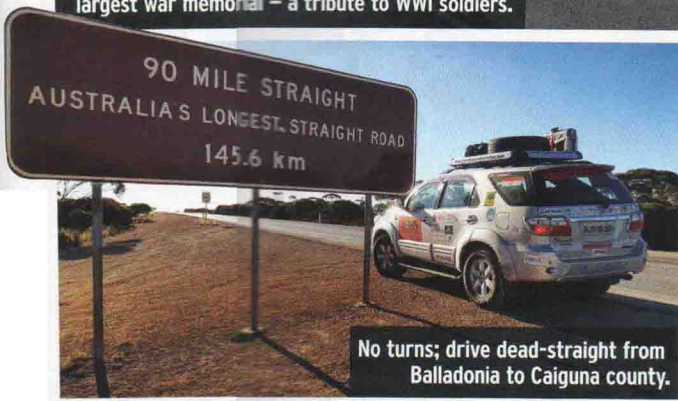
The AAM of Malaysia serviced our car thoroughly at their workshop.



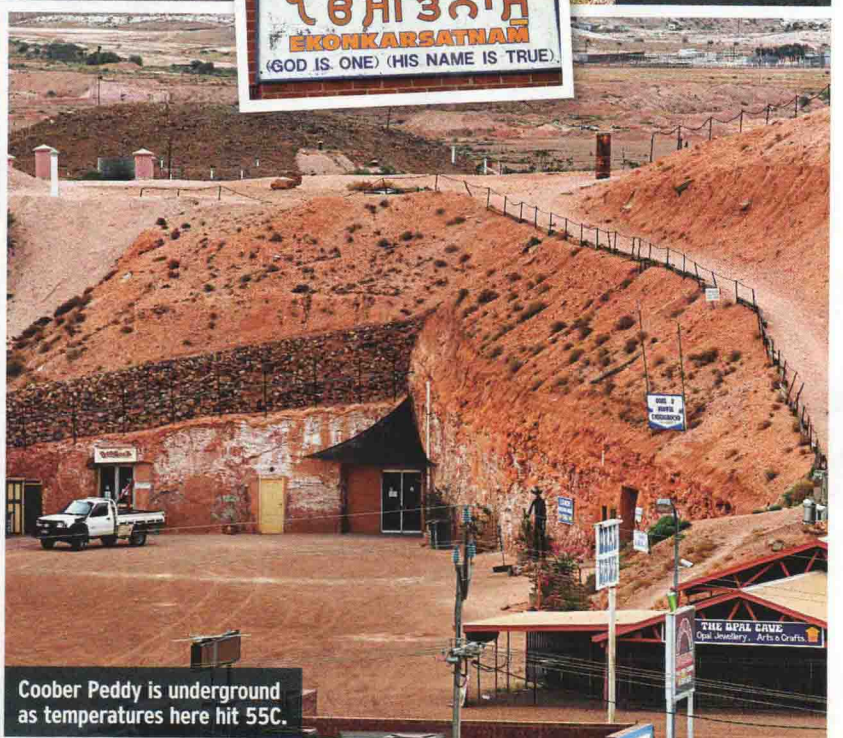
Australia's Great Ocean Road is the world's largest war memorial – a tribute to WWI soldiers.



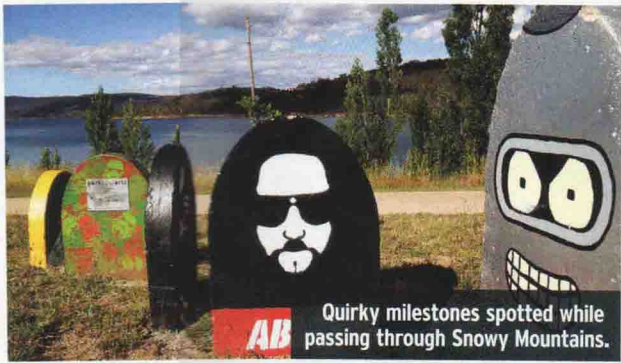
Art has no boundaries.



No turns; drive dead-straight from Balladonia to Caiguna county.



Cooper Pedy is underground as temperatures here hit 55C.



Quirky milestones spotted while passing through Snowy Mountains.



to 'frequent sightings of UFOs', and Coober Pedy, an underground opal mining town. Why underground, you ask? Temperatures here go as high as 55C during the day time, so the locals live in 'dugouts'. We even got the opportunity to see the famous colour-changing Ayers Rock, one of Australia's most recognisable landmarks.

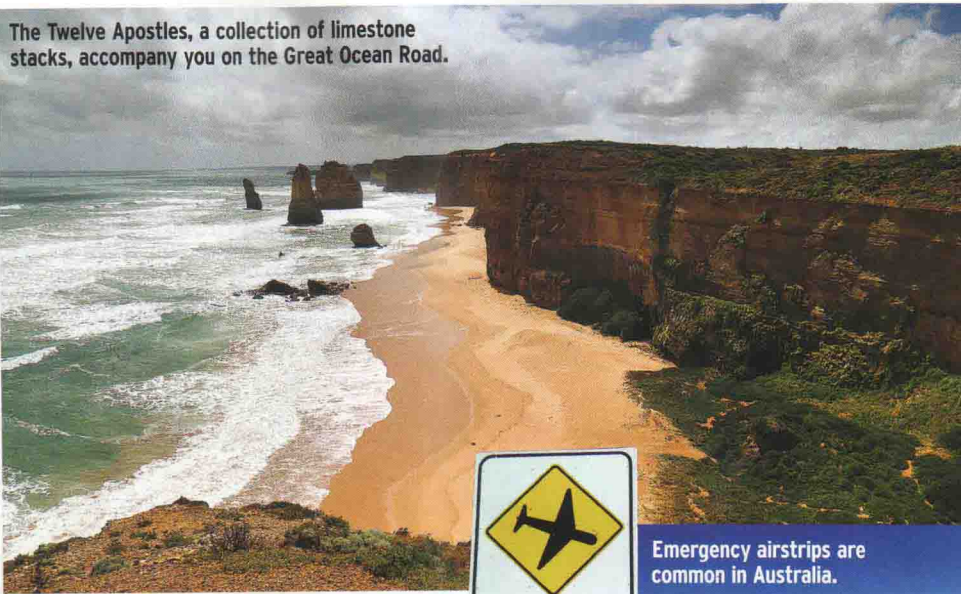
The remote terrains of Northern Territory were soon replaced by the lush farms

of Queensland. We drove through Brisbane and Gold Coast. Then came the beautiful Blue Mountains in New South Wales, a landscape so entralling, we lost track of time and broke our rule of not driving at night. The drive to Melbourne took us through the Snowy Mountains, with its crystal-blue shimmering lakes and small towns and villages. It all seemed to belong to another time. Melbourne, in contrast, was a bustling city, with a vibrant performing arts, music and culture scene.

It was soon time to test our mental and physical strength in the largest state on the continent. Victoria gave us The Great Ocean Road, rated as one of the most beautiful driving

stretches in the world. It hugs the south-eastern coast on one side and the hills on the other. It also is the largest war memorial in the world, a project dedicated to those killed in the war and conceived to employ and rehabilitate soldiers who returned to Australia after World War I. The drive west also took us through the Eyre Highway which, in my opinion, should be deemed the greatest driving road in the world. It connects western Australia and South Australia. If you don't mind straight, lonely roads with snakes crawling across them, highways that double up as air strips, hundreds of miles of coastline for company and nothingness for days, you will fall in love with the Eyre. Then there's

The Twelve Apostles, a collection of limestone stacks, accompany you on the Great Ocean Road.



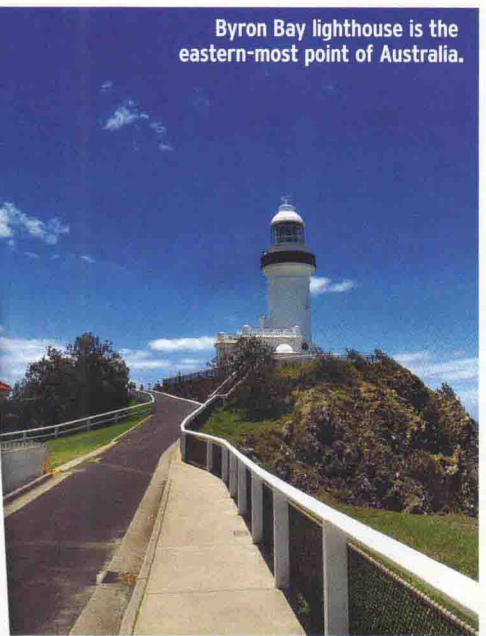
Emergency airstrips are common in Australia.

the 90-mile straight, the longest straight road in Australia and one of the longest in the world, that connects Balladonia and Caiguna districts in western Australia. You could close your eyes and drive dead-straight for 146km!

The real test, however, only began as we left Perth and drove through the Great Sandy Desert. The loneliness and the silence which accompanied us while driving along the desert was eerie. And if our car broke down or if we got lost, there would be no saving us. There's no mobile network and not a fuel station in sight for almost 300km. We drove for 30 hours straight and covered 2,391km across the desert.

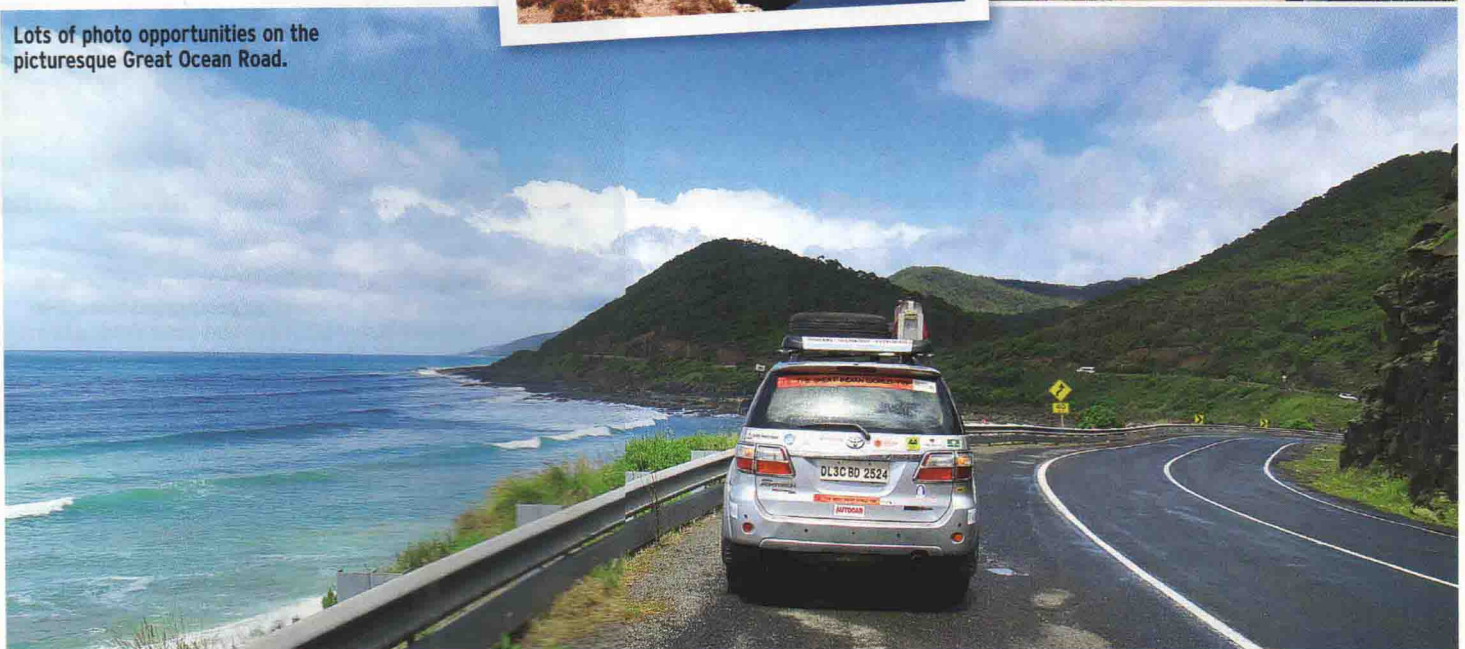
Next up was Broome, one of the most popular beach towns of Australia, and some much needed rest!

After over 17,000km in Australia, we now hold the Guinness World Record for the 'longest



Byron Bay lighthouse is the eastern-most point of Australia.

Lots of photo opportunities on the picturesque Great Ocean Road.



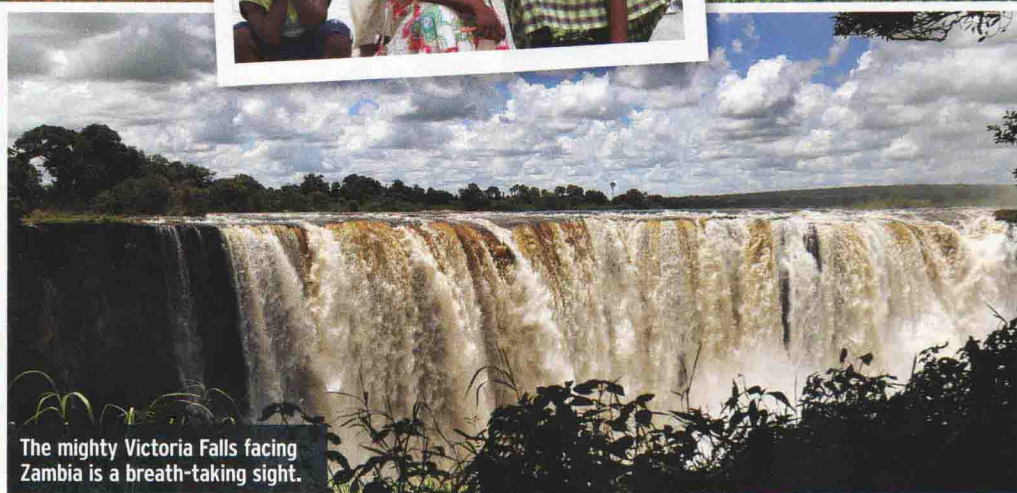
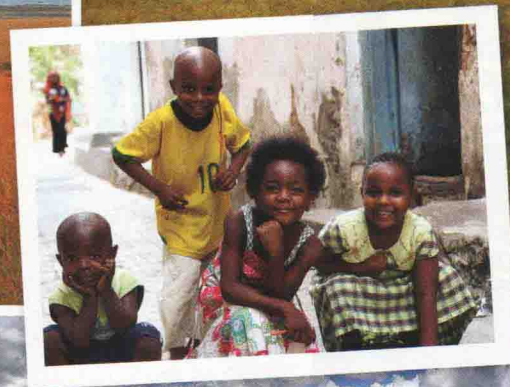
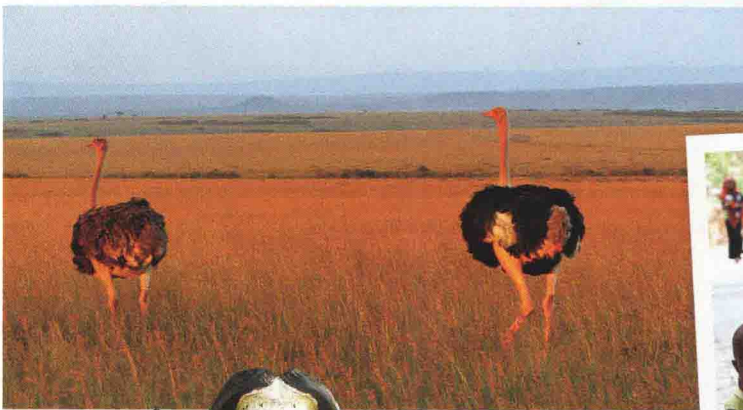
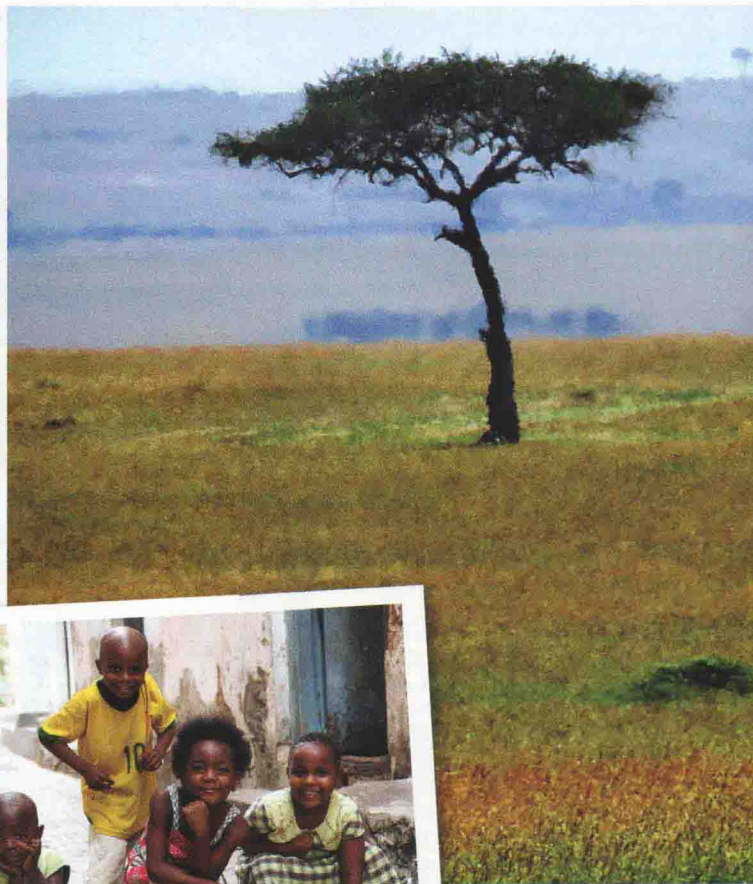
driving distance covered in a single country'. We were back in Darwin after a full circle, and our car was safely aboard a ship to Africa.

AFRICA

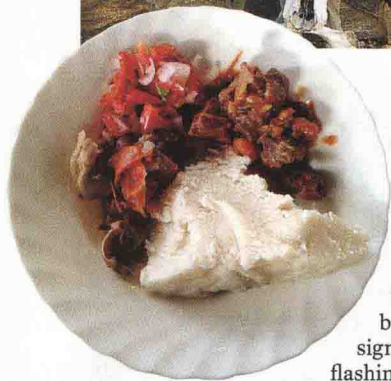
Cue "Wimoweh". We'd touched Mombasa, and were going to drive through Africa for an entire month. We watched in utter fascination as a new country unfolded in front of us.

The route to Nairobi was filled with potholes, chaotic traffic, people walking across highways, and aggressive overtaking by *matatus* – mini buses used for public transport in Kenya. It was going to be a while before we got used to the driving conditions here. Nairobi, the capital and the largest city in Kenya, is very busy and loud at all times. Our next destination, Kisumu, however, was a small town north of Nairobi. We'd started driving early, as usual, with a

Yes, the lions actually visit the waterholes in Serengeti.



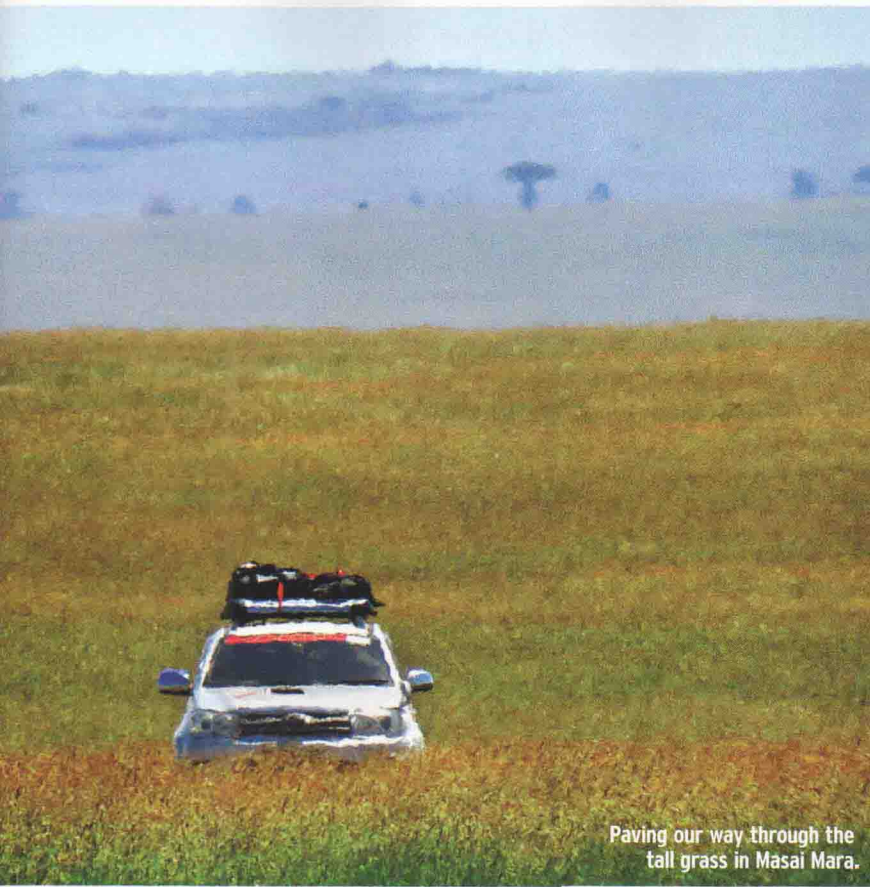
The mighty Victoria Falls facing Zambia is a breath-taking sight.



spectacular sunrise above the Rift Valley as our travel companion. The glory was shortlived. The engine and battery warning signs had started flashing. The car's battery had been giving us trouble since we got to Mombasa; it was dead after being on the ship for about a month, and had to be jump-started a few times enroute to

Nairobi. The electricals started dying one by one and about 10km outside of Kisumu, the car ground to a halt. Pushing it didn't help and we had to call our host, Anand, in Kisumu, who towed us straight to a garage. The alternator needed replacement and, luckily for us, the part was available in this small African town. The next morning, we drove to Masai Mara – one of the most amazing national parks in the world. We spotted Africa's wildlife in all its glory, what with elephants, lions, zebras, hyenas and giraffes sauntering all around us. Crossing the Kenyan border into Tanzania, we drove straight to the Serengeti, a national reserve, where we witnessed the surreal

migration of Wildebeests, all running towards Masai Mara in search of greener pastures. We crossed Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and into South Africa. We were more than happy to know that all our preconceived notions about Africa had been wrong. Malawi has the friendliest people we have met so far on the world trip, greeting us with a warm smile and always willing to help. Even the highways were a pleasant surprise. Malawi might be one of the poorest countries in Africa, but the highways are smooth, everyone follows traffic rules and there's no honking even during traffic jams. A thing or two to learn, for sure! We crossed Zambia and Zimbabwe without spending too



Paving our way through the tall grass in Masai Mara.



Trivia

Continent	Total distance covered in kilometres	Maximum distance covered in one day
Asia	8,127	900
Australia	17,707	2,391
Africa	11,663	1,193

Continent	Total diesel consumed (In litres)
Asia	797.455
Australia	1,962.48
Africa	1,296.11

Continent	Average cost of diesel in countries	Rupees per litre
Asia	India	53.718
	Myanmar	59.45
	Thailand	57.32
	Malaysia	37.87
Singapore	81.12	
Australia	Australia	106.23
Africa	Kenya	72.82
	Tanzania	80.09
	Malawi	130.10
	Zambia	92.49
	Zimbabwe	85.95
	South Africa	81.65



We've chosen the Toyota Fortuner for our journey around the world. Apart from a few punctures and the alternator breaking down once, we haven't had much trouble yet. It just keeps going on and on. Touchwood.

much time and it was all very pleasant; kind and hospitable people everywhere, and good enough roads. We did have to bribe a few cops in a few small towns when they tried to penalise us for the wrong reasons.

We finally entered the last country on the African leg. We crossed into South Africa from Zimbabwe, and it felt like crossing into a different dimension. The rural countryside was replaced with silky tarmac, proper road signs, professional staff at the police and custom posts, shiny new cars and service stations. We drove on the Garden Route, one of the most gorgeous roads in the world, crossing Port Elizabeth, Kynsya, Pletternberg Bay and Oudtshoorn

Crossing into South Africa is like stepping into a different dimension.

Ostrich Farm, where we actually managed to ride atop the mighty birds. Eventually, we reached Cape Town, donned our tourist hats and explored Table Mountain, Robben Island and the Cape of Good Hope.

We had mentally prepared for uncertainties and hardships in Africa, but the journey was nothing short of a breeze, thanks to the friendly, helpful natives. We arrived at Cape Agulhas, the southern-most point of the African continent, ready to board the ship that would take us to the next chapter of The Great Indian World Trip.

The Great Indian World Trip team is currently touring North America, to be followed by Europe.