

How time flies, we eventually docked in the Persian Gulf Iran on Wednesday 18 June, but to bring you up to date :-

Our flight out of Kathmandu departed Wednesday 4 June with Air Arabia, we took off on time and arrived Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. We had reserved a room at the swanky Hotel Centro Sharjah – by Rotana, just a few hundred yards from the airport. Needless to say there wasn't a cloud in the clear brilliant blue sky - the temperatures up in the roasting 40's. We had been informed that the new date the bike was due to fly out of Kathmandu to Istanbul had been further delayed and was now 9 June. Time was getting on and our Iranian visas due to expire on 22 June – or so we thought.

We decided to move into Dubai city for our second night. Keith had been in contact with an Emirati by the name of Saleh. He turned up at our hotel with an 1800 Honda Goldwing and said it was ours for as long as we needed it – wow what generosity. Off we rode together with Saleh's other friends to spend the evening at the Bikers Cafe on Jumeirah Beach Road, the cafe was the first themed cafe in Dubai that captures the spirit of motorcycling, and in fact, is the first in the entire Middle East.

Next day we were to be rescued by Chris and Verity who live and work in Dubai – Chris's Mum, Brenda, is a family friend of the Hooper clan. Keith had been in touch with Chris and they offered their home to us for as long as we needed it. So come late morning we were picked up and chauffeured to Jumeirah Beach on the Arabian Peninsular, where we spent some time lazily strolling along the hot soft golden sand and paddling in the deliciously warm sea, and our first close encounter of the distinctive sail-shaped silhouette of the hotel Burj Al Arab, this stunning structure has been voted the most luxurious hotel in the world. We were then whisked off to have a fabulous 'Friday' brunch, after which we were introduced to Chris and Verity's home and family. The family consisted of five rescue dogs – Yellow, Blondie, Sammy, Gucci and Midas, together with a puss cat called Kit-Kat. We can't thank Chris and Verity enough for their generosity during our six day stay with them.

Saturday 7 June. In the UAE the weekend begins on a Friday, strange but true. Our hosts had organised the day for us, showing us the sights and sounds of Dubai. We headed out to the famous and beautifully designed Palm Islands, they are an artificial archipelago infrastructure in the shape of a huge palm tree. We walked through the fabulous luxurious Atlantis Hotel located at the top of the Palm; it was the first resort to be built on the island and is themed on the myth of Atlantis, but includes distinct Arabian influences. That evening we dined at the Rivington Grill a unique setting, where we were to watch the spectacular Dubai Fountain Shows, choreographed to various musical themes. The backdrop to the show was the tallest man-made structure in the world, the incredible Burj Khalifa. Dubai is an exciting modern skyscraper city with a mighty impressive skyline, with every conceivable shape and size construction that you can think of.

Sadly next day Chris had to start his week at work. I make a point of visiting the top of each tower in the various cities of the countries that we travel through, the Burj Khalifa which is Dubai's crowning glory had to be experienced. We set off for our 11 am tour of this magnificent world class skyscraper center-piece in downtown Dubai. At over 828 metres and more than 160 stories, the Burj Khalifa holds many records including the highest outdoor observation deck in the world. The views over the city and desert were stunning but marred by the dust in the atmosphere, as per Kathmandu the air quality is poor. (see Keith's blog for a couple of images, although he will be experiencing some difficulty accessing his photo file – so will be unable to post further updates possibly throughout our entire Iranian travels).

Lunch was taken at the Cheesecake factory where the menu boasts of more than 200 freshly made selections; our window looked out over a winter wonderland setting of the indoor snow dome, activities include, skiing, snowboarding, tobogganing all in a temperature of minus 4 degrees with real snow, fun for all the family. We then made our way back home for a well earned swim.

The bike had been delayed once again and now due to be air freighted to Istanbul Monday 9 June. As we had the use of the Goldwing we decided to see a little more of the UAE and headed off to the capital Abu Dhabi; the roads were some of the best that we have ridden on, well maintained fast dual carriageways. The journey itself was exhausting in the hot desert climate with blue sky taking centre stage; even though it was only around two and a half hours we stopped a couple of times to take on water, in these temperatures we soon became dehydrated. It was a relief to enter our air-conditioned hotel just a few hundred yards from the Corniche.

In years gone by Abu Dhabi worked and traded in the pearl business and traded with others, but as this declined interest grew in the oil possibilities in the region in the 1930's. The financial districts house grand skyscrapers although in smaller numbers than Dubai, another notable modern building is the Emirates Palace, the design inspired by Arab heritage.

At around 4:30 pm we ventured out and headed for the Corniche, an impressive 7 km or so of manicured waterfront that includes children's play areas, separate pedestrian and cycle pathways, cafes, restaurants and a lengthy stretch of golden sandy beach. The energetic health fanatics were out and about, jogging (I don't think so in this heat), cycling, walking and exercising in designated areas. We walked the whole 7 km and were lifeless damp rags by the time we reached the end, a taxi back was in order. Our hotel was 'dry' not a beer in sight, so we headed off to the Sheraton which conveniently had an English pub located at one end – joy, a pint was our first prime objective.

Next day we returned to Chris and Verity in Dubai, the sun scorching through my trousers, I ended up pouring water over them, this dried out in a matter of minutes. At one of our watering holes we discovered a Burger King – they sold fab soft whippy ice creams for one UAE dirham

(approximately 16p), so we wolfed down a couple whilst standing directly under the AC unit, cooling the inner and outer self!

On our return Keith checked out the flight log for the bike – yay, it had left Kathmandu and was now residing in Istanbul and due to be freighted to Dubai on Wednesday 11 June. We were more than disappointed to discover that it would be delayed once more. Keith contacted Mehmet, a friend in Istanbul, who personally visited the cargo office and received verbal and written confirmation that the bike would be in Dubai on Friday 12 June – result.

We relaxed, Saleh had organised an evening entertainment for us – the premier of a film made by an amateur on his exploits of travelling around “Africa by Camel”, a very well constructed effort. We were amongst 100 invited guests which included the important Chief of Police and various other VIP high ranking Emiraté. A good evening was had by all, canapes and drinks at the beginning, special chocolates and Turkish coffee afterward.

Eleven days after the bike should have flown from Bangkok to Istanbul then forwarded on to Dubai we had confirmation that the black beast had arrived and was sitting in customs awaiting clearance. Once again Saleh was on hand to drive Keith and help with translations with the Customs Officials, two trips in all and several hours later the bike was in our custody once more. Between the two visits to Customs, Saleh picked me up and delivered me to his Grandfather's home where I had been invited to lunch with the family – a daunting prospect, but one that could not have been declined, and was a valuable insight into the workings of the female Emiraté's lives. The whole family gathers each Friday, men and women eating separately. The ladies taking their time and spending the whole afternoon chatting, whilst the men ate and got on with whatever they had planned. Once the afternoons affairs were completed both Keith, Saleh and myself headed off to Motor City, where we were to have new tyres and the windscreen re fitted, plus several other small jobs to be sorted out. We were done and dusted and returned to our hosts home by around 8:00 pm, really excited that we would be back in the saddle once more.

Saturday 14 June. We loaded up the bike and bade farewell to Chris and Verity and the puppies, we were off to book our ferry tickets to Iran for the following Tuesday 17th. In the meantime we had decided to visit the Sultanate of Oman which was only 130 km away.

We travelled along the coast and stayed overnight at the Sandy Beach Hotel and Resort in Fujairah still in the UAE. A great resort with private beach the blue silky sea lapping onto the red hot silver sand, also boasted a good sized swimming pool, a children's play area, but most importantly a bar and grill together with a seafood restaurant.

Next day we rode to the border with Oman – the customs and immigration for exiting the UAE and entering Oman taking a little over an hour to complete. We were taken aback by the beauty of this country. With the sun beating down, our route was to take us along hugging the perfect twisting coastal road, the breathtaking scenery had to be seen to be believed; traditional Dhows lay beached fishing over for the day, the sea was a bright turquoise blue and as clear as clear

could be. To our right lay huge slabs of pale earthy coloured strata, the towering cliffs formed when the earth's crust pushed the gigantic plates skywards out of the ocean. Our journey into Oman to Khasab was to be only around 38 km to our selected lush hotel for the night, and was to give us just a flavour of this striking country. We would have appreciated a couple more days to take a boat tour into the Oman fjords, but our ferry was to leave the next day, hence we headed back into Dubai once again. It was surreal to be riding along dual carriageways with sand dunes gracing each side of the road as far as the eye could see, camels wandered around the tented Bedouin encampments.

Tuesday 17 June. We duly arrived at the ferry port at 12 noon to start the necessary customs formalities for the bike to be stamped out of the UAE. We were advised to return at 3.30pm to complete the paperwork, luckily there was a Seaman's Cafe on the dock where we could buy lunch. After which we returned to customs then had to sit and wait for the immigration authorities in another building. We waited for well over two and a half hours before we were allowed into a larger area where our passports were stamped out. We then had to sit for a further half hour before being allowed to ride the bike down and onto the ferry. As it was out of season there were plenty of padded bench seats to sit/lie on, we had a complete one each, very necessary, the ferry wasn't due to leave until 9 pm via the Strait of Hormuz which in places is 96 km wide. An hour or so after the ferry had departed the port we were served with dinner, rice and I think it may have been some sort of chicken. The lights were turned off at around midnight; after an uncomfortable ten and a half hours or more we docked at 7.30 am in the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas. We were locked in, but I had left my head scarf and long shirt in the bike, so the captain let me go down to the car deck to retrieve them. We had to wait a further hour before the Iranian Customs Officers allowed us to disembark, but the bike and cars were not allowed off the ferry at this stage.

Once again all the passengers were locked in the immigration hall, then ladies first – except me, we were last after all the other folk had been stamped in, then started the long slow process. By this time it was 10.30 am, we understood that immigration closed at noon, so needed to get a move on. There was one super customs officer who had a good smattering of English and he helped us along our way. I had to sit and wait (the woman) and Keith (the man) had to do all the running around between customs and immigration, backwards and forwards like a yo-yo. All in all by 3.30 pm we were stamped into Iran, had procured the bike from the ferry and were on our way out of the gates, but we were stopped, there was one more procedure that had to be carried out. We hadn't paid for the port authority fees for warehouse storage (which we didn't use), loading and unloading - which Keith did himself. But rather than argue the toss Keith trundled back with an officer – paid the fee, had the necessary paperwork stamped – we were then free to enter Iran – lordy lordy hallelujah!