

Exploring the ancient Middle East

Although Arne Lehmann is currently travelling around Australia in a camper van, his thoughts are already turning to his next adventure: a two-wheel trip from the United Arab Emirates to western Europe. Crossing continents, cultures and climates, it's an ambitious plan for his first long-distance international bike ride.

But the adventurous 30-year-old BMW rider from Koblenz, Germany, believes in living for the moment: "When you are young, you want to do these things, but you don't have the money. When you are older, you might have the money, but either you don't want to do it anymore, or you can't physically do it. I just spend my money now and take the risk!"



Currently based in Dubai, Arne aims to start the 10,500km journey to his hometown in west Germany in April. "I'm not sure how long it will take, perhaps between one to two months," he says.

Starting from Abu Dhabi to Saudi Arabia, Arne will then drive over the truck route to Amman, Jordan. From there, he will take the King's Highway, an ancient Middle Eastern trade route to Aqaba and Petra, then back to Amman before heading to Damascus, Syria and Beirut, Lebanon. Then Arne will enter Turkey and follow the Mediterranean coast to Antalya, ride further north to Istanbul before crossing Asia's border with Europe into Greece.

A ferry ride from Patras, known as Greece's gateway to the West, will take him and his R 1150 GS Adventure to Brindisi, Italy, which he intends to zigzag through, from the Amalfi Coast to Tuscany and Cinque Terre, before reaching southern Germany. "Hopefully, if I still have enough energy, I will ride through three or four Alpine passes and have a beer in Munich with some friends before driving to Koblenz," he says.



Planning for the trip started six months ago and is all part of the fun for Arne: "I think the planning phase is amazing," he says, "preparing the bike, adjusting it for the luggage weight and different road surfaces, checking equipment, speaking with other travellers and doing online research. It's actually pretty cool."

However, there are some elements that he doesn't

want to organise, such as where to pitch his tent each night and how many hours to ride each day. “I assume I will travel between 150 and 400km a day, but it all depends on the weather, the road conditions, my mood and the landscape.”

Striking a balance between riding and exploring is essential for this easygoing traveller. “I’d like to get to know the countryside, and the people, and go hiking from time to time to explore. Riding is one thing, but exploring is another – and how can you do it best? With a bike, of course!”



Despite his laidback approach, Arne is concerned over some of the strict border controls, particularly in Saudi Arabia and Syria, which could prove to be his greatest challenges. “The worst case scenario will be that I have to transport the bike to Jordan and resume my journey from there. Syria might be a bit difficult, as only bikes with 150cc are allowed and mine has 1150cc!”

On the subject of bikes, it’s clear that Arne is extremely attached to his BMW motorcycle. “I am 1.93m tall and the bike is the perfect size for me. I can still repair things by myself – for other models you need testers and laptops to check diagnostics and service. And it has a larger tank for all-purpose riding conditions.”

His knowledge of BMW models is more extensive than most riders due to his time spent working for BMW Motorrad in 2004. While studying business administration at the University of Applied Science in Koblenz, he completed a six-month internship at the manufacturer and was involved with the launch of the R 1200 GS in South Africa, the K 1200 S at the Nürburgring and the R 1200 RT for the Austrian, German and Swiss markets.

As well as preparing his bike for the journey, Arne is boosting his fitness levels with regular exercise and improving his product knowledge of the bike and organising necessary tools, so he can carry out any minor repairs if required. His self-reliant determination suggests he prefers travelling alone than with other riders and will serve him well on his expedition from east to west.

“If you travel in a group, you have to make compromises, but if you travel alone, it’s easier to rely on the help and support of the people you meet along the way. If sleeping in a hut next to a farmer’s house in Turkey is a possibility, who knows? I also want to relax, and just to enjoy riding. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime trip.”

After exploring central Asia on two wheels and having already conquered Australia in a camper van, where will Arne’s adventures on the open road take him to next? “During this tour, I will probably find some nice spots to travel to, or meet other bikers who can recommend some nice places,” he says, vaguely. Only one thing is for certain: “I can’t wait to plan the next trip, but I just don’t know where to.”