

Munich to Bangkok – a review

From the comfort of his Cologne apartment Sebastian Klein has been reflecting on the past eight months, which have seen the youngster travel from Munich to Kuala Lumpur via Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Thailand and Malaysia among others, aboard his trusty F 800 GS. From the highs of crossing the Iranian desert to the lows of having to change his final destination at the 11th hour, Sebastian has experienced a mix of emotions during his time on the road. He has faced all challenges head on and, thanks to the durability of the F 800 GS, has been able to fulfil his ambition of getting 'off the beaten track' to explore some of the world's most extreme environments.

Having departed Munich in May, Sepp intended to reach Bangkok by early December; all the while soaking up the experience of a solitary long-distance motorcycle tour. But a political demonstration in Bangkok's major airport just as Sepp could almost touch the finishing line ruined his hopes of completing the planned route. However the intrepid explorer was not disappointed by the news. Instead he treated the change of plan as just another chapter in the story of his epic voyage.

Here he gives an insight into a truly amazing journey and describes a period of time that will change his life forever...



What have you been doing since you arrived back home?

Getting used to the climate! I also had to move a lot of my belongings from Munich to Cologne as I had been living in Munich before the trip. I have been working to complete my university degree too. I have my final test at the end of March, so apart from the holiday period, I've not allowed myself to rest. I know that if I take a break now, I won't finish my university work, which is very important.

Does it feel strange to be back to a normal way of living?

I think I've finally got used to it. It was difficult to adjust during the first week back at home, but I gradually established a rhythm to my life, which helped me settle down much quicker. It was very strange at first though. After visiting huge, modern and impressive malls in Malaysia, going shopping in the malls in Germany felt very odd. I'd never stopped to look at the mall – I used to just go in, get my shopping, and then go home. But I find myself stopping and taking notice of everything. Also, I must have walked out of my front door thousands of times in the past without taking notice of my surroundings, but since coming back from the journey, I stop and look around and take everything in.

How do you reflect on your time on the road?

I'm completely happy with everything I did on the trip and I look back at it with very fond memories. I recognised that the trip would be a great opportunity to learn new things about myself, and it certainly turned out that way. I was put into many different situations, each of which gave me the opportunity to do new things. One example is in India, where I got up every morning and there were 100 people staring at me while I packed my bike, insisting on pushing every button on it. In Germany, if this happened to me, I'd be very annoyed! Of course, it annoyed me the first two days in India, but then I realised that I had to be tolerant as it was an entirely different culture.

Do you have any regrets?

I'm lucky that I don't have many regrets at all. I suppose that, if anything, I wish I had spent more time in some of the countries than I had. I knew that this would be the case when I was putting the plans together, simply because I was fitting so many countries in such a short amount of time. I actually felt this about most of the countries I visited but naturally there were some countries where I felt I had stayed long enough. Despite this, I never felt that I had spent too long in a country.



Do you have to be a certain type of person to be on the road for such a long amount of time?

I thought about this question just a few days ago. I was watching a television programme called 'I will live my dream'. It followed a man who moved to Norway to live his dream of piloting a sleigh pulled by Husky dogs and make a living from this. He was very naïve about the challenges involved in achieving his dream. He didn't realise that the snow was seasonal and there was a lot of hard work to be done to prepare for the winter. Ultimately, he left Norway even before the snow came! Had he overcome the challenges, he would have been able to live his dream. In this sense, I think it takes a certain amount of resilience to be able to remain focussed on your targets and overcome any challenges, rather than avoiding them.



What was the most difficult aspect of being on the road?

Of course I missed my girlfriend, friends and family. However, I never felt as though any part of the trip was particularly difficult, perhaps just challenging.

What was the most enjoyable aspect of the trip?

Apart from the landscapes and the fantastic riding, I would have to say meeting so many nice people. Regardless of where I was in the world, I always felt welcome. If ever I needed any help, even though I was a stranger, there would immediately be somebody there even though they had nothing to gain from helping me. That was fantastic.

You must have so many lifelong memories of the trip. Which is the memory that stands out the most?

I think that northern India made the biggest impression on me. Whenever I think about the trip, those memories are the first that come to my mind. I hadn't been to the Himalayas before I embarked on the journey and they certainly made their mark!



Were you close to having any accidents on the trip?

Because of the distances I travelled I naturally had a few small scrapes but nothing major thankfully. I was concentrating very hard while I was on the bike and I think that helped me avoid too much danger. I felt the most in danger riding around the middle of India as the roads there are terrible and it seems as though there aren't any rules! There are just too many people and vehicles competing for space.

You completed the ride aboard a BMW F 800 GS. After thousands of kilometres of riding, how would you assess the bike?

It's simply perfect. I wouldn't make any changes to the bike. Before the trip we added a few Touratech parts and altered the rear suspension slightly, but that was it. It is a great bike for any type of riding and it felt comfortable on every terrain I rode on, from perfect roads to deep sand.

Do you plan any other similar projects in the future?

I have a long list of places I have yet to visit. But I suppose I need to assess whether a trip like this will be possible in the future. I need to complete my university course, find a career and I also plan to have a family sooner or later. Despite this, I remain passionate about undertaking big trips, as long as they are taken on my own transport

rather than trains or buses. You can't beat the freedom of going where you want, when you want.

What advice would you give to anybody planning a trip on this scale?

I receive many questions from people thinking about going on big journeys and I always insist that the most important thing to bear in mind is the amount of time travelling takes. One person wanted to travel from Germany to China in five weeks and although it's possible, I think they would regret not spending enough time enjoying the trip – they would be more focussed on just getting to their destination in time. I always recommend using the BMW F 800 GS though, as it didn't let me down on my trip.

Do you think that you have become a better motorcyclist as a result?

For sure, because despite where you are in the world, no road or journey is exactly the same. I was used to enduro and motocross bikes before the Munich to Bangkok project, so it took a little bit of time getting used to riding the F 800 GS off-road, but once I had perfected it, I never looked back.

Quick questions

How many kilometres in total did you travel?

Roughly 29,750km

How many litres of fuel do you think the bike consumed?

Around 1,300 litres. In Turkey the petrol was €2 a litre!

Which country did the best food?

Thailand – there was great food all over the country

And the worst?

Probably Iran, although it had the best people

What was your favourite country?

That's too difficult! I really enjoyed Iran as the people were great, but northern India was fantastic too

Where did you have the best night's sleep?

Slovakia, because I was enduro riding all day and was very tired. I could have slept anywhere!

And the worst?

Northern India, while I was staying near a nomadic tribe, in a tent. It was freezing!

How many photographs did you take?

Not enough

At what point did you feel furthest from home?

In southern India. It was while I was trying to arrange the transit of my bike to Malaysia. There was complete chaos and no organisation.