



SHUTTER
SPEED

Photographer Denise Ferris
Location Gate Loops, Nepal
Camera Minolta iIMAGE F100
Lens 38-114 mm
Exposure ISO 100, 1/750 s at f/8.0





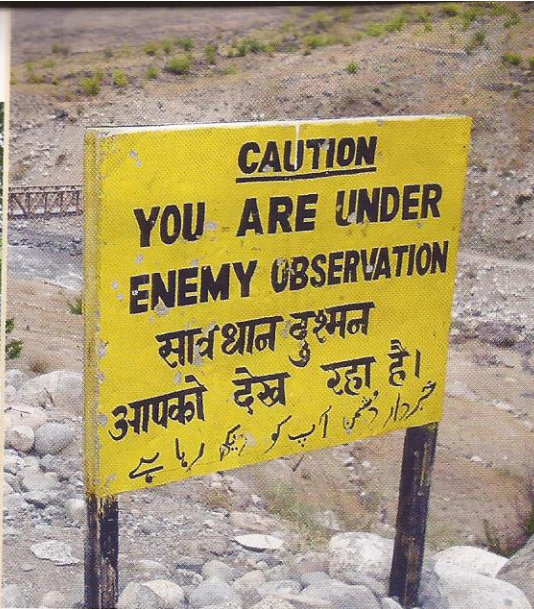
Scout's honour

Being prepared is the only way to get the most out of your trip. So – if you're a woman – listen up, as Denise Ferris of motorcycle safari company, Ferris Wheels, takes you through her travel checklist.

Story and photography Denise Ferris

■ FOR THE LADIES

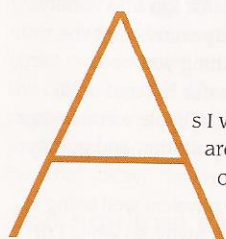




Main Smiling and ready for action – this is what you'll be if you prepare for your trip in the right way.

Above & left Spot the contrast... Most people will be happy to see you, especially if you learn a few key local phrases.

Right Places like this are what makes riding amazing.



As I write this, preparations are underway for my tour of Morocco in Northern Africa. This magical land is filled with exotic

images, places and stories – medinas and kasbahs; Lawrence of Arabia; the Sahara desert; the Atlas Mountains; Marrakesh and Fes.

My husband Mike and I are about to run our inaugural motorcycle safari of this evocative land. This trip has been anticipated for some time and promises to be an exhilarating adventure!

Risk is inherent in any adventure and with my sub-Saharan journey imminent some due diligence is called for. What do I need to consider and prepare for as a female undertaking a three-week trip to Morocco? Safety is first and enjoyment a very close second. In this article, I hope to provide a useful focus for creating an intrepid travel checklist. My checklist is a four pointer – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

The physical side

Comprehensive travel insurance is a must; in the unlikely event of disaster I want to know that I am covered. We all know motorcycling is a risky business at the best of times and I'm going to a foreign country, riding an unfamiliar bike and, I'll be riding on the other side of the road. It's a recipe for disaster if nothing else. Should I find myself in a Moroccan police station or worse, a hospital, it's prudent to have a financial and logistical back-up plan. A good insurance provider – such as the one we have used for many years – will not only take care of my medical bills but also organise the best level of

foreign medical care for me using their established professional network.

Purchasing a policy for a few hundred dollars is a no-brainer. A system for accessing my money while in a new continent is just as important as my passport. While traveller's cheques are a thing of the past, I still prefer to have a method of gradually accessing funds rather than carrying large sums of cash. A visit to my local bank will provide a traveller's cash card that I can load funds onto and for a reasonable fee, I can use it at ATMs in Morocco (and around the world).

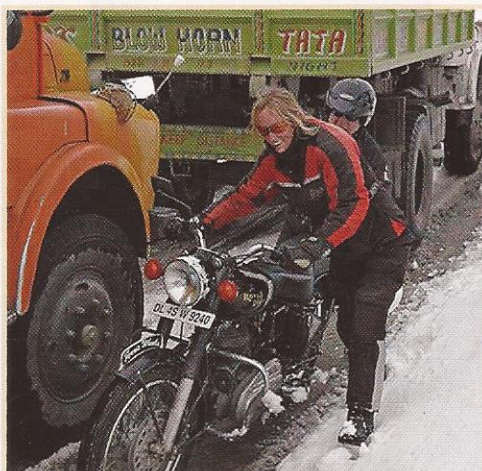
Before you go, make sure you make an appointment at your local GP or medical centre. As I'm heading to Morocco, there are no compulsory shots required and I don't get shots I don't need, but a general check up before departure and listening to the opinion of a good doctor is vital.

Purchasing a round of probiotics won't go astray either in managing the "interesting" new bacteria that gets introduced to your system when overseas.

It's important to give a copy of your itinerary and the hotel list to a neighbour or friend so there is someone who knows where you will be and when. Check in with them periodically via text and email to keep them informed.

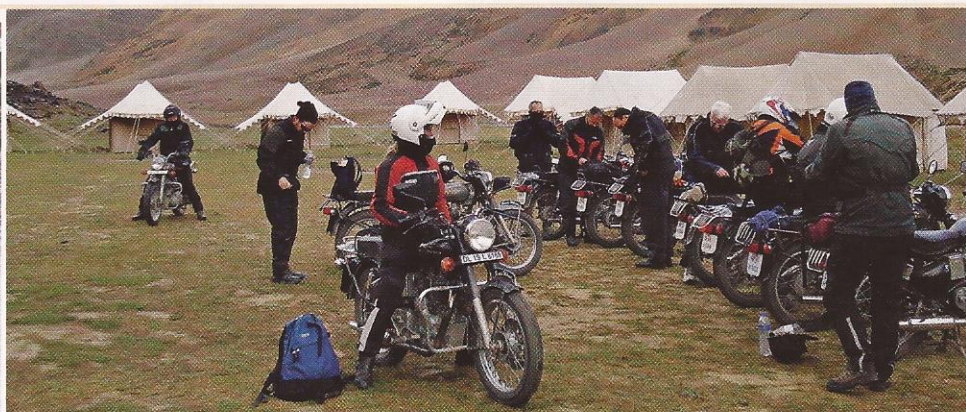
Smartphones are such an asset on the road – you can call and skype, text, take photos, make notes, calculate, listen to music, check maps and weather, set an alarm, know what time it is anywhere else in the world, and of course there is a veritable smorgasbord of useful travelling app options you can invest in like currency converters, a torch light... How did we ever live without our Smartphones?! ➤

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Packing the right clothing is the most time consuming pre-trip activity – especially for a woman! It's autumn where I'm going, therefore I need to pack the right articles to ensure I will be both warm and cool when needed – sun protection and thermals are the order of the day.

If I am physically comfortable I will enjoy my trip experience so much more. A combination of practical and feminine works, items that can be used on their own or as layers and selecting fabrics that travel well (i.e. things you can scrunch into a ball in your suitcase and they come out looking great). There are many wool-based brands that do this – they're light, wash



and dry easily and layer well – so they're worth the investment.

Taking comfortable walking shoes for all that sight seeing is an obvious inclusion for any traveller. I like my shoes (Emelda, Sarah Jessica Parker and I!), so although they are a heavy item I do take a pair or two for fun and variety.

On the riding front, safety comes first so make sure you have everything you need – good boots, helmet, gloves (for hot and cold), protective jacket and pants, reliable wet weather gear, bandana to filter any pollution and quality sunglasses.

Part of looking after my physical well being is continuing to exercise when away, so while I'm soaking up the Moroccan ambience, I will still

jog, have a morning walk and do yoga in my hotel/riad room. This means running shoes and all purpose exercise gear need to go in the case too. Earplugs, swimsuit, insect repellent and a few all-purpose snap lock plastic bags (great for keeping that passport in your motorcycle jacket when riding) mean I'm good to go on the physical front.

The emotional side

Experience has taught me if I give due diligence to all of these physical areas prior to initiating the voyage my personal safety and health and well-being are enhanced whilst away.

With the physical items on my checklist ticked off, it's time to move onto the areas of emotional preparation. Travelling brings with it all of the normal feelings and emotions of life, usually intensified by the challenge and unfamiliarity of the situation – this is what makes it an adventure!

Generally (not always) as women we are more likely to surf the emotional waves of life than men. For me, I need to consider my potential feelings and how best to manage them, whilst in an exotic foreign land. Simply translated, taking care of myself emotionally keeps me calm and calm is good for making wise choices and judgments.

Ensure you carry a few vitamin supplements, a journal for recording your travel experiences and feelings, and maybe some drawing materials for creative expression. I also have a travel candle that was a birthday present from a friend, which is designed to calm the senses.

The mental side

Prior to departure a good thing to do is to grab a guidebook and read it cover to cover. You will want to get the most out of your adventure as possible and you can never have too much information.

There are a couple of other ways I plan to learn more about Morocco before my visit, like Googling and chatting with people I know who have been there already. I've already watched a few Moroccan movies such as the Brad Pitt/Cate Blanchett movie 'Babel' and listened to some Moroccan-inspired music.

The late, great Billy Thorpe, after his own life-changing visit to Morocco with his family,



HERE'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN IT GOES WRONG

They appeared from nowhere. One minute I was alone, the next, two young, strong Moroccan men had a firm hold on my forearms. It was a dark morning on a deserted beach in Casablanca; a beach I'd walked many times before. I was being held against my will and I was terrified.

In my 25+ years of travelling the world, the last 10 as a professional international motorcycle tour guide, I'd not had any bad experiences. This was about to change.

"Stay calm", I told myself. As an optimist, I thought it would be okay. The men wanted my mobile phone. Everything I had was back at my hotel. They didn't believe me and proceeded to 'feel me over'; molestation, it's called. A line was crossed, I got angry, swore, shouted and struggled. Was it worth screaming with no-one else there? Finally, after accepting there was no mobile phone, they released their hold. "Please continue on your walk," the ringleader said, and as instantly as the men had appeared, they vanished. My relief palpable.

I could have looked for police, but there was no point, even if I found a station, the perpetrators would not be locatable.

What if they had been after more than a mobile phone? I hated men who used force and bullying to get what they wanted, particularly with women. My poor judgment, walking alone on a dark deserted beach, in no way justified their actions.

I quickly headed for the well-lit safety of the promenade and gently made my way back to the hotel. It was day one of our itinerary and I had a tour to run. I was shaken but unharmed (and tentative around Moroccan men for the next three weeks), but I was wiser and more aware – and all before breakfast. ■

declared Moroccan music to be the thread that holds the society together. Mike and I caught up with friends recently at our local Moroccan restaurant, which was enjoyable and informative, both trying dishes we'd never heard of and couldn't pronounce.

Acquiring some familiarity before you enter a land where almost everything is new – the food, currency, tipping protocols, social norms, history, road rules, language – means you can focus your mental energy on other things while you're there. An additional benefit will be greater confidence if (or when!) you get lost or feel vulnerable. Completing mental due diligence gives you a greater sense of control over your circumstances.

Like it or not, as a woman travelling the world, it's sensible to find out about the attire that will be appropriate for the area you're visiting. This is especially true for me in the predominantly Muslim country of Morocco. Women dress and behave differently where I am going and if I want to stay safe and not draw unnecessary attention to myself I will be well served by adopting a few local customs.

For me, when out in public it will be prudent to cover my arms and thighs and not wear some necklines that in Australia would be considered normal. Sadly, there is still major inequality between males and females in certain areas of the world.

In Morocco (and many other Muslim countries) females can legally wear whatever they like but if you choose to wear shorts and sleeveless low cut tops you might be sending unintended messages to the local men and women you pass by. Like anywhere in the world, they will react and respond consistent with their visual perception of you and with first impressions, so much of this is based on physical presentation. If your dress immediately offends before you have even had the chance to interact with the locals you are not off to a great start. At worst it may just be provoking danger.

Learning a few local key words and phrases is important to ensuring your international undertaking will be both enjoyable and safe.

The most common greeting in Arabic-speaking Morocco is "as-salaam alaykum", "peace be upon you". I've practiced the pronunciation and will try it out soon after arriving and check I'm getting it right – as much as possible with my special antipodean accent! This beautiful greeting will be reciprocated by Moroccan people with "wa alaykum as-salaam", "and upon you be peace". So, initiating my new found Arabic skills will serve several purposes – it will help me break the ice and initiate connection with local people and will convey respect for them, their culture and country. This is important whatever country you go to.

Stumbling through imperfect local pronunciations elsewhere in the world has always served me well, even if I haven't earned any language awards. Generally, my flawed attempts are met with smiles of appreciation and result in openness and assistance from local people that would not otherwise have been offered.

Although a small gesture, in making the effort to show respect, you are more likely to be treated with respect, in more ways than one.

A number of Moroccan guidebooks indicate Western tourists – while being perceived by most Moroccans as more sophisticated – are also often perceived as somewhat gullible. I'm likely to be sized up against a variety of criteria, my physical presentation, intended time in the country, my occupation, my family (symbol of wealth) and whether this is my first visit to Maroc. If I can utter a few Arabic words, this will increase my street cred and demonstrate my familiarity with the culture so that those looking to do me harm or part me from my possessions are more likely to choose someone else. "Shukran" (thank you), "wakha" (okay), "la" (no). I'll be fluent in no time!

The spiritual side

This leaves the last aspect of my female adventurer's checklist – all things spiritual. It's a bit more difficult to define and perhaps not everyone's cup of tea, but useful nevertheless.

These are the things that if I give due diligence too will nurture my soul and feed me (in a non-physical sense) when I am out in the world exploring. I am taking some music (via my iPhone iTunes library, thank you, Apple), maintaining my daily meditation and selecting a book, which I prefer in its old-fashioned paper format and often pass on or swap with fellow adventurers. The latter I think I will pick up from the airport on my way out to celebrate the beginning of another new adventure!

With this, preparations are complete. Remember, it's important to do the work before you leave to make your trip as enjoyable and memorable as possible. Big international trips on a bike are luxuries only afforded a few times in most people's lives so you want to make this a good one. For me, there's a new BMW F 700 GS waiting for me on the other side of the world. Of course, not everything will go to plan and I will need to adapt to what Morocco has in store, but I wouldn't miss it for the world.

Life itself is the adventure – bring it on!

Denise Ferris is co-owner of well respected motorcycle safari company, Ferris Wheels. She's probably covered more ground and experienced more cultures overseas by bike than almost any other woman in Australia or New Zealand, and is well versed to talk about female adventure preparation. If you'd like to know more, go to www.ferriswheels.com.au



TO THE POINT

Here are Denise's top 10 travel tips to ensure your trip is a great one.

- 1 Comprehensive travel insurance is essential, giving you peace of mind, practical support and care in the event of the unthinkable happening.
- 2 Carry your passport on you at all times and take a few photocopies of the main photo page packed separately should they be needed in an emergency.
- 3 Get an ATM or Travellers Cash card, giving you access to local currency anywhere, anytime – and your credit card for extra backup.
- 4 Invest in a good mobile phone. You can store all your important emergency contacts and details. It also gives you access to the Internet, allows you to calculate, write notes, take photos, etc.
- 5 Leave a copy of your itinerary and accommodation details with someone at home. Check in with them from time to time by phone/email.
- 6 Read up on the local customs for women in the countries you are visiting i.e. clothing, behaviour, beliefs, etc. When you are there, watch what local women do and don't do. You want to be yourself without attracting unwanted outcomes.
- 7 It may not always be desirable but it is always safer as a woman to travel with/hook up with someone else. You can look out for each other and take care of your possessions much more easily.
- 8 Be careful about your use of drugs and alcohol, they impair your judgment, making you more vulnerable. You may not be as equipped to read a situation or handle it.
- 9 In potentially unsafe or unknown situations, have a Plan B. If the worst happens what will you do? How will you take care of yourself?
- 10 Last but most importantly, be aware. Women are often very trusting by nature. Bad things do happen to good people and anything can happen to you at any time! ■