

BicycleTraveler

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the Tribe

Text & photos: FREDRIKA EK



Pedalling into the old city of Bukhara, I slowly found my way to Hostel Rumi. By word of mouth alone, this has become the meeting point of all touring cyclists entering and leaving Uzbekistan. And sure enough, just as the sun set and I was rolling my bike into the courtyard, I was met by six or so other touring bikes and a table full of smiling people, just about to dig in on dinner. Judging by everyone's weird tan lines, and the ridicu-

lously oversized portions of food, it was clear – these people were definitely cyclists.

That night was my first taste of Bukhara. In total, I spent three full days in Bukhara: one just to become human again after a particularly grueling stretch, and a couple to explore the city and get myself and the bike ready for the rest of Uzbekistan. During my entire stay, I stuffed myself with unreasonable amounts of food to gain back the weight I lost in the desert. Being together with so many other cyclists was a huge highlight for me. Since leaving Sweden some five months earlier, I'd only bumped into a handful of other two-wheeled travellers like myself. Mostly I felt like a complete alien, as I rolled into towns with my fully loaded bike. And at some point on the road, I think I started to consider myself as somewhat of a weirdo as well.

Here in Bukhara, for the first time, I truly felt like I was part of a community.

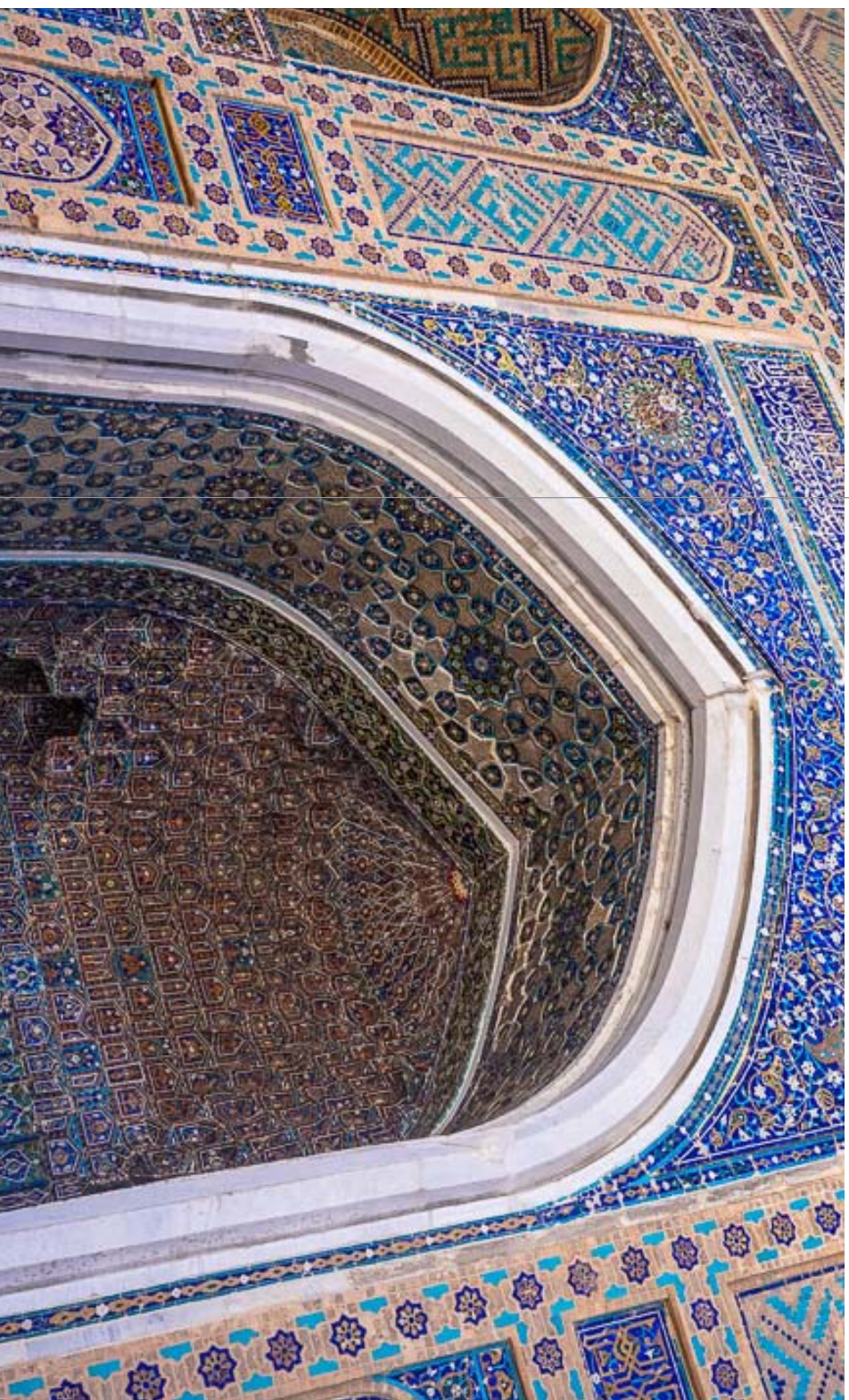
Now, to be fair, it was one eccentric community. Where else would saddle sores be a completely legitimate topic of discussion during dinner, or the top speed of mosquitoes (14 km/h for anyone lacking this possibly vital piece of knowledge) be considered as truly valuable information? But however strange it sounds, it really was as someone remarked during breakfast one morning: *'Guys? I do know it's a twisted one. But this really is my tribe – and I love it.'*

Despite our shared love of bicycle adventures, we were still an incredibly diverse group of people, with different reasons for setting out, our own styles, goals and our own stories of how we ended up on the saddle of a bike. During my

days in Rumi Hostel, I saw more than 10 cyclists come and go. None of them were quite the same. There was the British guy Nick, who set out from home some months earlier, and planned to keep going 'until he finds somewhere worth staying'. Some, like the silent Italian couple on their honeymoon, were only travelling the region for a few weeks, while the older German couple, were heading home on the last leg of a world tour. There was also a loud guy, travelling *with* rather than *on* a bike as he had hitchhiked

most of the way from Europe. Perhaps the two cyclists who stand out most in my mind, however, were two who showed perfectly how one touring cyclist does *not* equal the other. Both were in it for the long run but – apart from their use of bicycles to get around – had absolutely nothing in common.

Patrick, from Germany, had already been touring for eight years and intends to see every country in the world with his bicycle. Dressed in lycra from head to toe, his setup was the most



light and aerodynamic of any I've seen. He covers something like 200km on any given day. Patrick is a sportsman and the world is his arena.

And then there's Olivier from France, who left home about six years ago. Carrying everything from a toothbrush all the way up to a paraglider, he is the Jack Sparrow of bicycle touring and really has the bike to match. This guy is a traveller down to the core – and let's just say he'd need a bit of a tailwind to cover 200 km like Patrick.

In the midst of all these comings and goings, there was me.

Coming to Bukhara I was drained, in every sense of the word. But leaving, I was filled with a childlike inspiration and motivation, the likes of which I hadn't had since the very start of my tour. I had been reminded of my reasons for

going on this journey, and even gotten a few new ones. While standing still, I could feel my love for being on the move stronger than I had done in months.

My body surely would have benefited from sticking around a few more days, but my mind just wouldn't have it. I was packed up and ready to go. Ready to fully explore this new country I was in. To live life, in the best way I know how. I was ready to head out and create new stories. And to outrun some mosquitoes. **BT**

In 2013 Fredrika Ek stumbled upon bicycle touring and pedaled 3 months across Europe. She became hooked and began to plan her dream trip even before she was back in Sweden. www.thebikeramble.com

Right: Frenchman Olivier stands in front of his overloaded bike.
Below: Patrick from Germany with his super lightweight setup.



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