

Feature Cambodian adventure

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This was always going to be a full-on adventure: 1125 miles off road, riding a Honda XR250 across one of the poorest and least-developed countries in South East Asia. From the chaotic streets of Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh to hacking through lush jungle trails en route to the deserted 12th century Angkor temple Preah Kahn, this trip promised to tick all the boxes – and then some.

Cambodia is a beautiful country populated by friendly, humble, yet seriously resourceful people. A country where you load your bike onto a hand-made raft to cross a river – or simply wade in and carry it across with the help of your mates if there's no boat. A country where a service station is a tiny stall with rows of Pepsi bottles filled with petrol and refreshments include deep-fried snake, tarantula or cockroach. Here's the story of my personal adventure ride through it...

Day 1: State of emergency

The plane from Bangkok to Phnom Penh is coming into land and it's just become clear what's in store. For as far as you can



We stop at a temple where our bikes are all blessed by a Buddhist monk



MCN'S MICHAEL GUY

see there's more water than land.

The previous weeks had seen Cambodia battered by severe typhoons, which had led to flooding and a state of emergency being declared in parts of the country, with over 100,000 people displaced from their homes.

Fortunately, the rain has stopped and things are getting back to normal, but to ensure the 20 strong group of riders I'm riding with will make it to the finish, the route has had to be altered.

I'm still nervous, though, and I go to bed with the words of one of our highly-experienced Cambodian guides

MCN's Michael Guy joined a 30-strong group of riders on his Cambodian trip



In search of temples

► MCN man crosses Cambodia on dirt bike ► 1125 miles through chaotic cities and typhoon-hit jungles ► More next week in MCN's Adventure Special



Some puddles are a few inches deep, some can swallow a bike – but they all look the same!

ringing in my ears: "You have to be careful, some of the puddles are just puddles, 5cm deep, but others can be very deep – maybe two metres! The trouble is, they all look the same..."

Day 2: Phnom Penh to Snoul (125 miles)

After being acquainted with our bikes, we fight our way through the chaotic Phnom Penh rush-hour. There's nearly 30 of us including guides and support crew, and we get plenty of attention. Six miles later, the traffic is thinning and we soon get our first taste of off-road as we ride in light sand alongside the Mekong river to our first stop for the day.

This stop isn't for fuel or a drink – we've come to our first Angkor temple, Wat Tar Kung, to meet head monk Samdech Tat Heung. The temple is opposite a school and within seconds of our arrival we're surrounded by wide-eyed, smiling children, eager to hear us speak and laugh at our off-road riding kit.

Our bikes are blessed and the monk

gives us all a Buddhist protection cord to tie around our wrist. A few more miles of Tarmac and we're off-road again. There's still over 90 miles to go until we reach Snoul, our first overnight stop, but it's not about the destination – this trip is about the journey.

The riding is relatively easy, but the scenery is stunning – ancient temples are commonplace, as are friendly locals. So far there's no sign of the deep ruts and flooded roads we've been promised, but it's a nice way to start the trip and my recently-blessed XR250 is running just fine.

Day 3: Snoul to Sen Monorom, Mondulkiri (90 miles)

If day one was an easy introduction, day two is a test. With the typhoon over, the rain is replaced with sunshine and humidity. Gone are the open, dusty roads, instead the route is a narrow, muddy trail littered with small, loose rocks.

The smiles of day one are gone. This is hard going and the result is crashes galore and some exhausted riders by

the halfway stage. Sensing morale is wavering, we are teased with the reward of jumping into Bus Ra waterfalls to cool off, if we get to our destination, Sen Monorom, in time.

This added motivation makes progress in the afternoon more rapid, despite our Camelback hydration rucksacks being empty. Three punctures later, we roll into Sen Monorom. It's been a long, hard day and only a few of us have the energy to ride another 20 miles to the promised waterfall – but oh, is it worth it.

It's into the water – kit and all. My Alpinestars Tech8 boots act like deep sea diving wellies and the water is so refreshing. The ride back is beautiful, the sun is setting and the dust from the bike in front hangs in the air, but there's no rush. I'm cool for the first time all day and there's a cold beer waiting back at the hotel.

Day 4: Sen Monorom to Kratie via Chollong (155 miles)

It's a 6am start and we're soon into some fast off-road sections. Although it's

