

FINANCIAL TIMES

how to spend it

ZEN AND THE ART OF
MOTORCYCLE MINDFULNESS



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zen and the art of motorcycle mindfulness

A new motorcycle adventure company is pulling away from the pack with its stripped-back, off-radar, digitally disconnected itinerary. Simon de Burton finds himself in the Moroccan desert

was going to start this feature with the words: "Imagine you're a successful but strung-out professional in a high-pressure job." But the chances are you don't have to imagine this at all, because that is exactly what you are. And when it comes to de-stressing and getting away from it all, you probably check into a luxury resort in an exotic location. But when you get there, do you really switch off? Or do you feel compelled to remain connected, even if you've promised

yourself to ration the use of your mobile/iPad/laptop to ensure some quality time?

Well, I recently discovered a more effective way of recalibrating – and that's from the seat of a motorcycle riding roads less travelled. It takes you out of your head, lifts your spirit, rejuvenates your soul, and can quickly pull the whole absurd treadmill of our 21st-century existence into sharp perspective.

How To Spend It has reported before on the growing popularity of "adventure" motorcycling, and that often

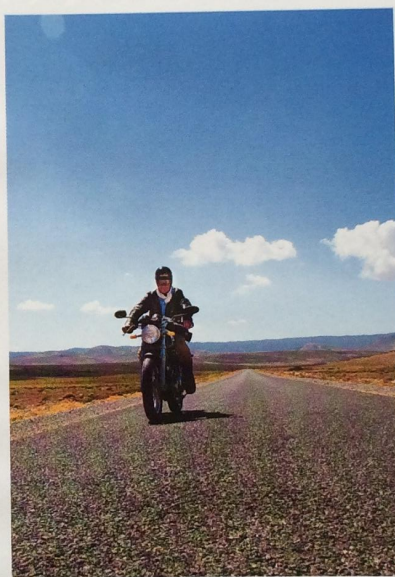


From left: guest rider Sam McConnell with Sam Pelly and Edward Tatbot Adams of Legendary Motorcycle Adventures



Clockwise from above:
Sam McConnell taking a break in the back of the support vehicle.
Planning the route ahead.
The Roman ruins at Volubilis. The author enjoying the ride on the morning of day five

“It’s a stripped-back trip – the luxury element is the opportunity to think and reflect”



means saddling-up a state-of-the-art Honda or BMW with an expensive suite of lionproof luggage, top-notch riding kit and bike-to-bike intercoms.

You can then join an organised tour group that will take you on a prescribed route with perfectly timed stops for refreshments, in advance of arriving at pre-booked hotels of the standard to which you’ve become accustomed. Here you can use the complimentary WiFi to check your e-mail and ensure your business colleagues know you’re always there if they need you...

But for those who truly want to use a motorcycle to step outside their normal lives for a personal, off-the-radar reboot, Sam Pelly and Edward Talbot Adams might just have hit upon a perfect formula.

Pelly – the older brother of Guy Pelly, the nightclub entrepreneur and friend to Princes William and Harry – is a talented photographer who met Talbot Adams during an extended stay in Andalucia. Talbot Adams, meanwhile, is a well-travelled former soldier with some rather useful survival skills who, post-military service, spent two years living in Papua New Guinea before returning to Europe to become a farmer.

Having quickly discovered a mutual love of motorcycling, the pair decided to establish a business called Legendary Motorcycle Adventures, which aims to provide people who lead high-stress, high-speed business lives with an opportunity to slow down, take

stock, switch off and, hopefully, remind themselves that there really is a whole other world out there.

“It’s about offering travel that’s stripped back to basics, but with a luxury element that is becoming increasingly difficult to find – and that’s the opportunity to think and reflect,” says Talbot Adams of the trips, which eschew the latest, high-performance adventure sports machines in favour of the famous Royal Enfield Bullet, a bike that has remained largely unchanged in its design for 68 years.

“Going back to an older-style machine that will plod along all day at 50-60mph, is robust enough to tackle dirt roads and understated enough to blend in seemed the logical choice for trips intended to be elemental and slower. It’s rather like flying by Tiger Moth as opposed to Learjet,” explains Talbot Adams.

The blending in also extends to the four-wheeled support vehicle that accompanies the trips: not a

gleaming new SUV but a low-key, 22-year-old Range Rover equipped with a built-in camp kitchen and a roof rack for carrying the accommodation – simple, single-person tents called “swags” that can be put up virtually anywhere in a matter of minutes.

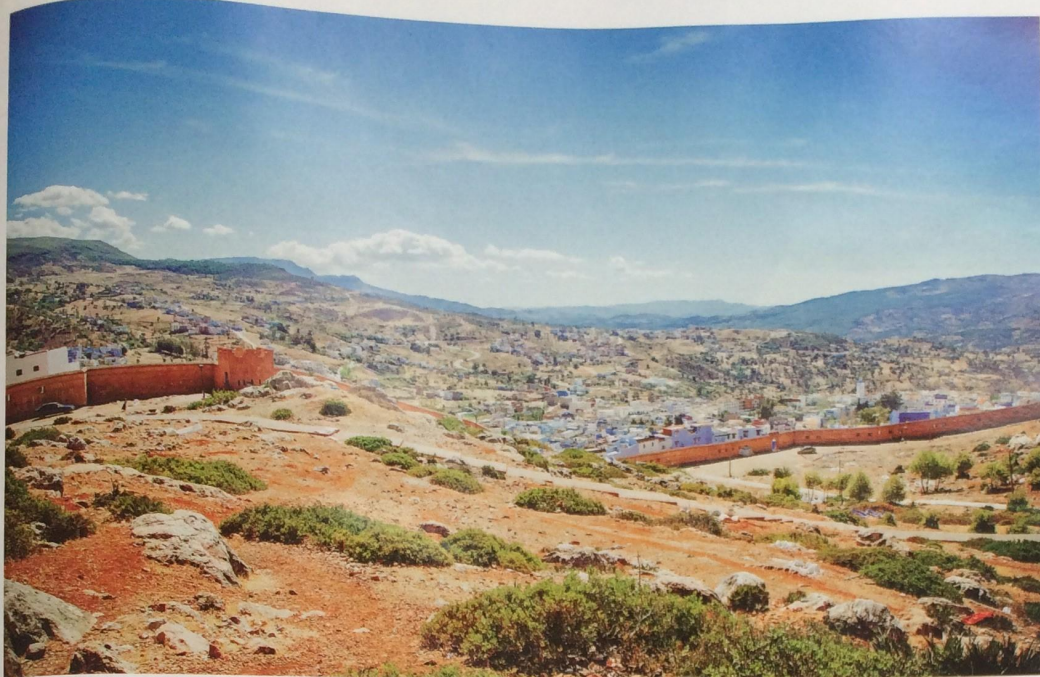
And if all that puts you off because it sounds like the antithesis of luxury, it shouldn’t. “The idea of establishing LMA came, in part, from my own ‘moment,’” recalls Pelly. “I took a step back from it all and went travelling for two years with my young family – that’s when I grew to appreciate the chance to take time and simplify. We literally shed kit and baggage as we travelled and learnt to stay still long enough to really see.”

“Legendary Motorcycle Adventures is about showing other people they can do that – and also that ‘stuff’ really can entrap us. There’s limited space on the motorcycles and in the support vehicle, so everything we take has to be compact and fully functional,” says Pelly, whose venture has attracted support from the likes of clothing brand Belstaff, and Malle, a London-based company that specialises in vintage-style leather luggage designed specifically for motorcycles.

The adventures start at £1,800 for five days, rising to £3,620 for 12 days and more for tailored tours for those who want a bespoke trip – while riders who truly “connect” with their machines (and it does happen) can even buy their Royal Enfield and riding kit to take home.

Intrigued by the ethos of the business, I joined Legendary Motorcycle Adventures for a five-day ride in Morocco to find out whether or not it really was different from the many organised Royal Enfield tours already on offer – and quickly discovered that it was.

For a start, there is no formal programme, only a loose plan of where to go and what to do. Secondly, the group is far smaller than usually found on such trips – ours comprised just four riders. Talbot Adams and Pelly have set an upper limit of eight and they like to get to know prospective clients well in advance of them booking a trip, with initial meetings taking place at the South



We pitched the swags in truly wild surroundings - totally disconnected from civilisation

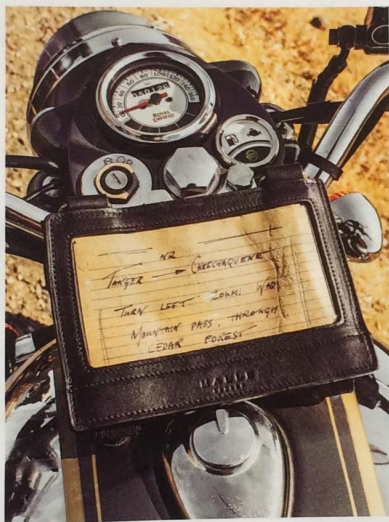
Kensington Club, which LMA has made its unofficial London base.

"We aim to avoid the alpha-male syndrome and want to ensure that people understand this is a stripped-back experience," says Talbot Adams. "We're keen for women to come along as well as men but, regardless of their sex, riders need to be open-minded because there is a strong element of unpredictability, meaning much of the success of each trip hangs on the group dynamic. We're not exactly trying to make people put on hair shirts, but we do require them to bring patience and a sense of humour. And if they aren't motorcyclists already, we can arrange for them to be trained and gain a licence. Often it's the real beginners who get the most out of it."

On meeting the duo in Gibraltar, I was introduced to the driver of the support vehicle for our trip, the impressively qualified Sam McConnell, whose regular job is serving as the chief expedition leader for the Royal Geographical Society. An expert at planning and logistics, McConnell is highly familiar with coping with what Pelly and Talbot Adams described as "the sort of situations some people might regard as dangerous".

Having collected the Royal Enfields from Talbot Adams' idyllic smallholding in Gaucín, Spain, we rode the 60-odd miles to the ferry and, after a 50-minute crossing rich in Moroccan administration, landed at the port of Tangier-Med to begin our ride through Tétouan and into the Rif Mountains. It's here that the "unpredictable" nature that is all part of an LMA trip soon made itself apparent with a burst tyre on one of the bikes, followed by a seasonally uncharacteristic rainstorm.

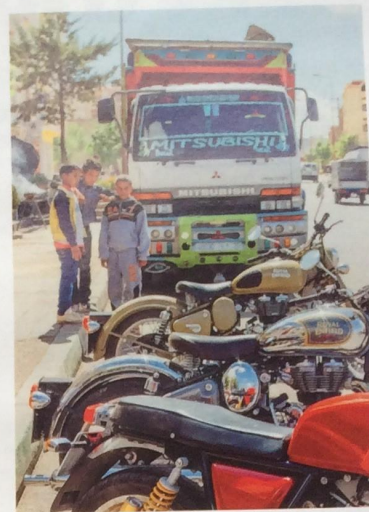
The tyre problem was swiftly and calmly resolved by Talbot Adams, but it was pitch black by the time we stopped to ask directions at a remote roadside snack hut. There we made friends with some off-duty hashish farmers, who plied us with heavily sweetened mint tea before pointing us towards our first night's accommodation - a simple, utterly charming stone



lodge up a steep, gravelled track in the heart of a breathtakingly beautiful, WiFi-free valley.

As we settled in, Talbot Adams fired up the Kelly Kettles and swiftly produced a meal of remarkable quality from the Range Rover's tailgate. "A whole community is developing around the tours - and that includes some really great cooks, such as Simon King from the *Hairy Bikers* television programmes and Tom Perkins, author of the culinary travel book *Spices & Spandex*. They're among many who have supplied us with recipes for delicious meals that can be made with the minimum of equipment," says Talbot Adams.

By dawn, rain had given way to the makings of a scorching morning, during which we rode - carefree and bonding by the minute - to the absurdly picturesque "blue city" of Chefchaouen, before completing a gentle, 150-mile day by striking a wild camp near the well-preserved Roman settlement of Volubilis. From there we ambled towards the eastern High Atlas, the loyal thump of the Royal Enfield engines gradually helping us to



Clockwise from top left: the blue-painted city of Chefchaouen. Local youngsters admire the Royal Enfield Bullets. The riders discuss where to make camp. The author's route-planner: no satnav

adjust to that slower rhythm of life that LMA strives - but not too hard - to bring within reach. Eventually turning off metalled roads altogether, we followed a (completely unplanned) three-mile route along isolated tracks that crossed a Mongolian-style plateau, before tackling a dried riverbed leading to the edge of a heavenly scented cedar forest. Here we pitched the swags in truly wild surroundings - tens of miles from the nearest hotel, hours from the nearest airport and totally disconnected from what is known as "civilisation".

But with a crackling fire, a good single malt, vibrant conversation on topics as diverse as astronomy, divorce, poet laureates and, of course, motorcycle adventures, we agreed we had seldom felt richer - or more acutely aware of who we really were. To invoke a cliché, it seemed we had reached a place where we "found ourselves". And it just so happened that we had arrived there by Royal Enfield... ♦

REVS AND RELAXATION

Simon de Burton travelled as a guest of the **Moroccan National Tourist Office** (www.muchmorocco.com) and **Legendary Motorcycle Adventures** (www.legendarymotorcycleadventures.com), which offers Royal Enfield Bullet trips from £1,800, including motorcycle hire, petrol, riding kit, ferry, accommodation, food and drink, guides and back-up vehicle, excluding flights. **British Airways** (www.britishairways.com) flies from Heathrow to Gibraltar eight times a week, from £88 return. **EasyJet** (www.easyjet.com) flies from Gatwick to Gibraltar daily, from £60 return.