



A YEAR ON THE ROAD

2018 in review



Sri Lanka:

Our first stop this year was the tear-drop shaped jewel of Sri Lanka.

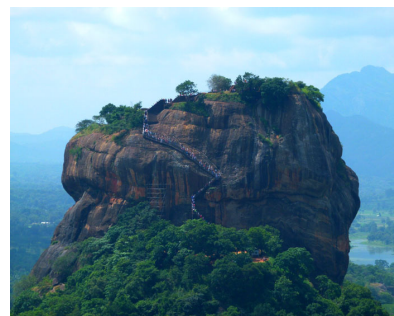
We ended up spending ten weeks on this most exotic of islands, starting in the frenetic capital of Colombo, then making our way around the south west coast staying in beach towns, and up to the cooler central highlands to visit the tea plantations.

Then it was off to Kandy, the cultural capital, onto the historic towns of Dambulla and Anuradhapura, and over to the East Coast beaches.

The people were amazingly warm and friendly and the diversity of Sri Lanka's geography and wildlife is next to none.

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Top: Tea plantations near Haputale, south-central highlands.

Left: Hikkaduwa Beach

Middle: Sigiriya Rock

Right: Buddhist Stupa, Anuradhapura

Fine Folk Along The Way

Philip and Janice:

We met Philip and Janice from Vancouver Island in Canada on a hike up to Little Adam's Peak in the small highland town of Ella.

We only chatted for ten minutes, but we did exchange contacts and, as these things sometimes do, the stars aligned for us and we visited them in November in their hometown.

Philip took us to see salmon spawning in their local creek.

Chamika Gimshan:

We stayed with Chamika and his family at their place in Mirissa on Sri Lanka's southern beaches. He's a fantastic lad, loves his cricket and studies Russian. We still keep in contact.

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Maldives:

From Sri Lanka we flew west across the Indian Ocean to the Maldives, a collection of coral cays that support a large number of high-end resorts.

Famous for its honeymooners, it is notoriously expensive, although this can be bypassed (read the opposite panel).

Shazz and I flew into the tiny island capital Male and spent the night before taking a ferry to Maafushi, our island destination.

We spent six nights here, swimming, snorkelling and fishing. The locals were very friendly and there were plenty of places to eat, although our guesthouse was the cheapest place and had a good menu.

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Top: The jetty at nearby Adaani Resort.

Left: Maafushi main beach

Middle: The boys from Alaka

Right: Maafushi beach street



Maldives: Staying on the Cheap

Up until recently, visiting the Maldives has been a pretty costly affair. That's probably the reason it is known mainly as a honeymooner's destination.

Nowadays, some of the local islands have been given some autonomy to open up hotels and guesthouses and take on tourists.

This is the case for Maafushi where we stayed. Our double room with ensuite at The Alaka Guesthouse cost about \$AUD70/night, much less than a resort island.

Being Islamic, there's no booze on the island. To get around this, they have a motor cruiser anchored just offshore with a free tender to take you there and back for a sunset drink.

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Oman:

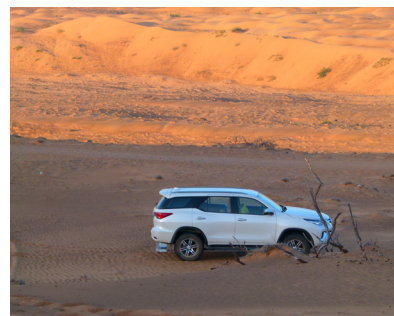
On our arrival at the brand-spanking new airport in Muscat, we were greeted by the mega-friendly staff who were obviously very proud of their country's latest infrastructure.

We stayed in Muscat overnight after picking up a 4x4 hire car and then again after touring the top part of the country.

Oman is quite diverse. From the clear blue waters of the coast, to the rugged Al Hajar mountains and the vast desert regions. You can drive this area in a week exploring old forts, lush desert oases, crumbling ancient villages and deeply-etched canyons with cool, clear water gushing through them.

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Top: Al Hajar Mountain range. Middle: Camping near Ibra, on our way to Nizwa.

Left: Wadi Bani Khalid

Middle: Camping in Wahiba Sands

Right: Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Muscat

Oman: Self Guided

Although its only just being discovered as a popular tourist destination, Oman can be quite expensive, especially when booking tours and accommodation, which most people do.

After a little bit of research, Shazz and I managed to avoid some unnecessary expenses by hiring a car and driving ourselves. We also picked up some sleeping gear at the local Carrefour supermarket in Muscat and slept in the car as well. We were easily able to find a secluded beach, mountain top or sand dune to park up every night and fall to sleep under the star-filled skies.

You will need a 4x4 though if you plan to visit the rugged Al Hajar mountain region.

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Dubai:

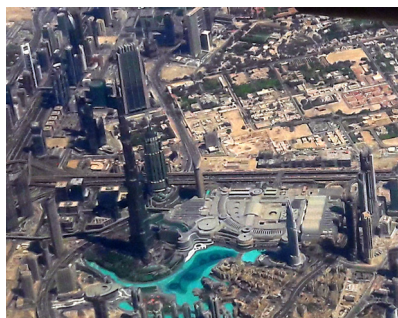
We took a bus from Muscat to Dubai, where we did a petsit, minding a kitten in a 15th floor apartment.

We've never been big fans of Dubai, we find it rather pretentious, expensive and soulless. So, when the Dubai border police took me away for 3 hours and told me I was going to jail for 2 years, I was understandably less endeared!

This was our third time here, and apart from some new buildings, nothing much has changed in this dusty, Lamborghini-filled, high-end tourist attraction.

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Top: Shazz, Nhung, her sister Thi and me at Nhung's apartment in Dubai.

Left: Flying into Dubai

Middle: Cookie-cutter estate, Dubai

Right: A feast with Nhung, Thi and friends.



Fine Folk Along The Way

One of the saving graces of visiting Dubai this time was meeting up with one of our Vietnamese friends, **Nhung**.

Nhung used to be one of my Teacher's Assistants when I first started teaching in Ho Chi Minh City. We hit it off straight away. She is quite a clever and capable girl, not only learning to speak English fluently, but French as well.

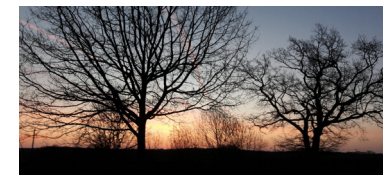
Ambitious, she soon found herself working for Vietnamese Airlines, then eventually Emirates.

We have always kept in contact and it was so nice to meet up with her in Dubai, with her sister and flight attendant buddies.

Now she travels all over the world - well done Flygirl!

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England:

We had left our bikes in England with our mate Dave more than 2 years ago, and now it was time to pick them up.

We also managed to fit another housesit in while we were there. This gave us the chance to have a bit of a look around again down in the southern counties.

Our hosts, Ali and Liz not only picked us up from Heathrow, they picked up our bikes from Dave and got their bike mechanic to reassemble them for us. They had a small semi-detached cottage our amongst the fields and three dogs to look after. It was a pretty nice set up.

We also got to meet up with Dave again and check out county Kent.

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Top: At the pub with Dave Barrow and Nicola Slattery (another great pal down from London)

Left: Our lodgings in Kent

Middle: Walking the dogs, plenty of fields

Right: The Lord of the Manor!

Fine Folk Along The Way

We met **Dave Barrow** in Morocco on our West Africa truck trip and have kept in contact ever since.

Dave's a bit older than us, but he's like a cheeky young rascal with a heart of gold and a real passion for travel.

So, when we asked him if he would mind our bikes for us, he never hesitated. He could have never guessed it would be 2 and a half years before we'd return for them!

It was a real pleasure to catch up with this bloke in Kent and meet his soon-to-be new bride, Helen. He proudly drove us around, showed us the sights, and even took us out for the night to see one of his favourite bands.

Always a pleasure Dave!



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Canada:

It was an ominous introduction to Canada as we flew into Toronto on the back of a massive ice storm.

We had arranged to do a housesit in Port Severn, in central Ontario for 10 days. This was our first time to see frozen lakes, beavers and Bald Eagles, it was a remarkable experience. This gave us the time for the ice to melt before setting out on our cycling adventure.

We made our way down to our friend, Rod Lewis' house for a few nights in Mt Albert, then we cycled to Dundass (via Toronto) on the west side of Lake Ontario for another housesit, and finished our time in Canada with our good friend Teresa at her shack at Crystal Beach on the shores of Lake Erie.

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Top: Our AirBnB in Barrie, Ontario. It use to belong to the manager of the railroad.

Left: Day One of the ride

Middle: With Teresa at Niagara Falls

Right: Rod Lewis shows us the way!



Fine Folk Along The Way

Rod Lewis:

As life goes by you meet a lot of people without much character - Rod Lewis is NOT one of them!

Rod's a larger than life, proud Canadian and a gentleman and scholar to boot.

I connected with Rod on an internet group called "Long distance cyclists." Rod himself has cycled across Canada and likes to build and fix his own bikes. As I was to find out online, he also has a great appreciation for good music, and that's where we really connected I think.

It was a moral he lived right on our route down to Toronto and we got to enjoy 3 days of some major hospitality. Rod and his wife, Alison are what cycle touring is all about, Cheers guys!



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United States:

We crossed into the States at Buffalo, New York via the Peace Bridge which connects Canada and the US.

Up here in the north, things look pretty much like Canada we think.

From Buffalo, we headed due west around the bottom of Lake Erie. We stayed in National Parks and with Warmshowers hosts (a sort of Couchsurfing for touring cyclists). We camped in the tent most nights, resting our weary legs. It would be some time before we found our strength again.

We kept cycling west through New York State and Pennsylvania until Ohio. It was here at the town of Huron that we left the lake and hit the grain belt.

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Top: Sharyn and I crossing from New York State to Pennsylvania on the bottom of Lake Erie.

Left: Farm, Alexandria, Minnesota Middle: Rock'n'Roll Hall of fame, Cleveland, Ohio Right: Sunset at Cormorant, Minnesota



Fine Folk Along The Way

Our Warmshowers hosts across the States were nothing but exceptional. The hospitality of these people continually blew us away.

Leo Hoganson in the city of Erie was an absolute gentleman, he had a fantastic ensuite room for us, a fridge full of cold beers and amazing stories of his own TransAm crossing.

Sam Patterson in Vermilion, Ohio is an absolute champion. A retired doctor for the Cleveland Indians, he is also an avid cyclist (of the Lycra variety!). Sam not only put us up, fed us home-cooked Vietnamese food, gave us cigars and single malt whiskey, he also caught up with us in Seattle in Oct with his daughter.



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United States:

There are 80 billion acres of America under corn, and, another 80 billion acres under soy crops. That meant we'd need to cycle 160 billion acres to come out the other side of the Grain Belt - That's a lot of cycling!

We crossed out of Ohio, but not before visiting an old work friend from Saigon, Megan, in Toledo. Amazingly, she was only about 100kms off route.

We crossed into Indiana and headed west under Chicago and into Illinois, all the time watching the corn grow higher. There are some fantastic little towns out there.

We crossed the Mississippi into Iowa and followed it north to Minneapolis, then headed west once more to Fargo in North Dakota. From there it's dead straight on Highway 46, the longest, straight stretch of road in the States.

In Williston, we put the bikes on a train to Montana, we'd had enough of the prairies.

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Top: 100 degree heat and Shazz climbs yet another hill between Lowden and Dyersville, Iowa.

Left: Becky and Dan, Cormorant, Minnesota Middle: Block Party, Elmore, Ohio Right: Hofer's Pub, Henry, Illinois



Fine Folk Along The Way

Where to begin?? The fine folk of the mid-west were thick on the ground. **Gordon and his neighbours from Elmore, Ohio.**

Let's start with **the Rod Lewis dopleganger** who brought us back a beer at **Kil So Quan State park in Indiana** when we really needed one.

In **Rensselaer, Illinois**, our Warmshowers hosts **Chris and Jodie** went over and above the call of duty for us, driving us 50 miles to get a spare tube!

The good folk at **Hofer's Pub in Henry, Illinois**, certainly looked after us.

Dan and Donna at Preemption, Illinois, didn't let us down.

First Responder **Dale at Lowden, Iowa**. The boys at **the Two Gingers Tavern in Cascade, Iowa**.

Richard Palucci in McGregor, Iowa. **Brian and Leah in Minneapolis, Minnesota** for putting us up. **Eric and Rae in St. Cloud, Minnesota**. **Harold and Jennifer in Alexandria, Minnesota**.

And finally to the amazing **Becky Marie Sorenson in Cormorant, Minnesota** for taking us in when we had nowhere to stay!



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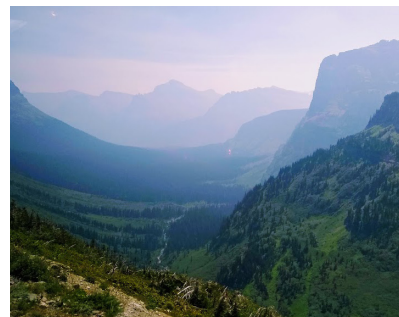
Our train dropped us in East Glacier. During the night we had passed through the flat, featureless plains of East Montana and were now standing at the foot of the Rockies and Glacier National Park.

With some trepidation, we climbed over Going to the Sun Road and crossed over Logan Pass, the main reason we had chosen a northern route.

Unfortunately, bushfires and smoke prevented us from going much further, and, for safety's sake, we ended our crossing in Fortine, Montana. There we took a train to Seattle and rode the outer islands north to Bellingham, our final destination

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Top: Standing atop Logan's Pass on Going to the Sun Road in Glacier National Park, Montana.

Left: Final distance, Bellingham, Washington Middle: Glacier National Park, Montana Right: Steph & Rich Bowers, Bellingham



Fine Folk Along The Way

Thanks to **Bruce, the Manager at Jerry's Bar** in Fortine for driving us back to Whitefish to get the train.

A big thankyou to **Jeremy and Jackie on Bainbridge Island** for putting us up for 3 days, showing us around and sharing their stories of travel with us. Also for arranging for us to stay with **Steve and Lisa in Port Ludlow**. You guys are the best!

Cheers to **Ricki and Charlie in Port Townsend** for putting us up as well.

And last, but certainly not least, the incredible **Bowers family in Bellingham**. Thanks **Rich, Stephanie and Danna** for looking after us like royalty and keeping our precious bikes for us till next year, for this we are eternally grateful.



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Canada:

In October we crossed into Canada once more, this time with my sister, Sue. We took the train from Seattle to Vancouver and hired a car for 10 days to do a loop around British Columbia.

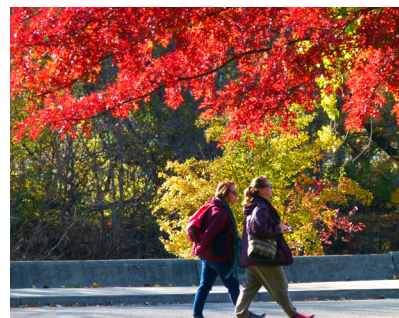
We drove directly from Vancouver to Squamish on the Sea To Sky Highway and enjoyed some great views of Howe Sound Fjord.

3 nights in Whistler surrounded by snow-capped mountains, was a picturesque highlight.

We left the breath-takingly scenic Sea To Sky highway to stay in Kamloops for a night before heading over to Mara Lake and a Farm Stay. Along the way we called into watch the Sockeye Salmon spawning near Chase. Next it was down to Kelowna for another Farm Stay, then to Willowbrook, Hope and then back to Vancouver.

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Top: View of Seton Lake from the Sea to Sky highway.

Left: Sockeye Salmon spawning near Chase Middle: Shazz & Sue in Salmon Arm Right: Fraser River near Hope



Fine Folk Along The Way

Teresa Lukianiec:

We first met our Canadian friend, Teresa as a fellow crew member on a yacht sailing the in Caribbean.

Since those days we have kept in regular contact and she has visited us in Vietnam as well as this year in Sri Lanka.

This year during our Canada trip she had come visited us again and shown us lots of the local attractions. She showed us around in central Ontario and then hosted us again in Crystal Beach, her summer hangout. She also took us up to see the mighty Niagara Falls and the casino.

We can't thank her enough for her generosity and hospitality and for making this trip so much more enjoyable.



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Canada:

After our loop around BC, the three of us took a ferry across to Vancouver Island where Shazz and I had a housesit in Victoria, the capital.

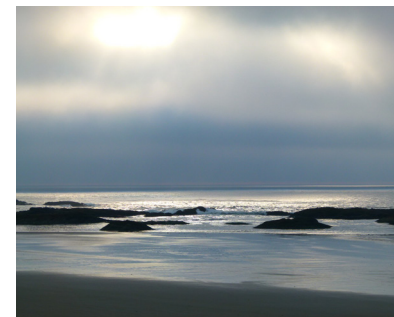
As Sue has always wanted to see Killer Whales in the wild, we hired a car, and leaving Shazz to housesit for a few days, headed up to Ucluelet and Tofino on the wild west coast.

The drive up through the central mountain range was a highlight, with lots of gushing rivers and spectacular lakes. There was no luck with the Killer Whales, but we managed to have a great time.

At the end of our stay, our friends we met earlier in the year in Sri Lanka, Philip and Janice, took us out to dinner and then had us over for the night and showed us around Sooke. We even got to see Coho Salmon spawning in a local creek nearby.

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Top: The mirror-like Sproat Lake on the way to Ucluelet.

Left: Kennedy Lake

Middle Left: Ucluelet fishing fleet

Middle Right: A deserted Long Beach

Right: Ucluelet coastal walk

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Broken Hill:

As we do most years, we headed back to our hometown of Broken Hill, an outback mining town in far west New South Wales.

Our mum's live a kilometre apart, so it's easy to see them both when we get home.

This year has been a year of drought in BH and several severe dust storms have blown through the city, including one when we were there. Water is a major problem here and no rain means both water restrictions and dust!

Even though we haven't lived there in many years, and we travel the world constantly, we still call Broken Hill "home."

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Top: A recent dust storm sweeps over town and obscures Argent Street, the main street. Credit: Andrew West Photography
Left: Sunset in Blende St. Middle Left: My mum's garden Middle Right: Brilliant sunsets are a regular thing Right: View of town along Argent St.

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Malaysia:

We decided to end our year of adventures in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia with a few housesits.

We haven't been here for a while and we always enjoy ourselves here.

We began down in Malacca, a World Heritage Listed city between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. It was our third time there and as usual it was enchanting.

KL on the other hand, is a big, bustling city in the middle of its Monsoon season. It rains heavily most afternoons and clears the air of most of its fumes.

It will be a relaxing way to end our year on the road.

Cheers! Keep on following us on Facebook and the link below. 2019 is lining up to be a blast!

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Top: Craft beer with our good mate Tamas in Kuala Lumpur

Left: KL Skyline from our hotel Middle Left: Colonial building in Malacca Middle Right: Xmas is alive and well in KL Right: It was Comicon in KL



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Thanks:

As I've mentioned many times, the friendliness and hospitality we were shown on this trip was beyond our previous comprehension.

Complete strangers from all walks of life have touched on our story and become part of it, and we're so glad they did.

I've tried to remember all of you, but if I've left someone out, please forgive me.

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Sam Patterson, Vermilion, Ohio



Harold & Jennifer, Alexandria, Minnesota



Jackie & Jeremy, Bainbridge Is, WA



Lisa & Steve, Port Ludlow, Washington



Dana & Steph Bowers, Bellingham, WA



The Two Gingers Tavern, Cascade, Iowa



Gordon & Friends, Elmore, Ohio



Leo, Erie, New York



Jane, Geneva on the Lake, Ohio



Jeff Poe, Glacier National Park, Montana



Rod Lewis' dopelganger, Kil So Quan, IND



The Gallagher family, Ottawa Lakes, MI



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Thanks again:

Read all about these wonderful, unique people in our upcoming blog. Click on the link below ...



Roger & Laura, Everett, Washington



Ryan, Kewanee, Illinois



Dale, Lowden, Iowa



Bill, Mentor on the Lake, Ohio



Brian & Lea, Minneapolis, Minnesota



Annie, Jane & Warren, Monroeville, IND



Kelly, Ted & Danna, Muscatine, Iowa



Ricki & Charlie, Pt Townsend, WA



Chris & Jodie, Rensselaer, Indiana



Donna & Dan, Preemption, Indiana



Eric & Rae, St. Cloud, Minnesota



Robert, Winona, Minnesota

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