

TEXT
SHARON IEDEMA
PHOTOS
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IMAGE: A TUK-TUK
IN PHNOM PENH

CANNONBALL IN CAMBODIA

Katie Beeby looks like any other woman, but underneath lies a Wonderwoman indeed!

This perfumed steamroller is the creator and organiser of Cannonball Charity Rides (CCR), which plans fundraising motorbike rides for charities. Usually held

in Australia, in 2014 the first international ride took place in Cambodia. Many charities have benefited from CCR, such as The Endeavour Foundation, Tabitha Cambodia, Educating Cambodia, Mlop Children's Centre, Safe Haven Children's Trust and Heartkids.

I had the honour of travelling with Katie on this ride to Cambodia, in effect as her PA, and getting to see all the behind the scenes planning, preparation and sacrifice needed to make this ride both a safe, enjoyable and memorable one for the motorcycle-riding participants and a visit that left others better off than before. Funds raised from this ride assisted three separate charities operating in Cambodia:

- Educating Cambodia, a project of the Beaudesert Rotary Club, providing a year's salary for a nurse for the Chuorph'av village.
- The Safe Haven Children's Trust, not far out of Phnom Penh, providing hundreds of dollars worth of toys.
- The Tabitha Foundation, providing the funds to install three new wells for



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those in need: some for individual families, others for communal market gardens.

There was obvious enjoyment for the riders, as well as for Katie and me, in the trip we took across the country and the places we stayed overnight, including a home-stay visit. I believe, however, that the enjoyment was made twofold because of the visits we had. At the children's centre, we

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witnessed where the wells were placed, while in Chuorph'av we had a 'get together' with the villagers and members of the Beaudesert Rotary Club. The Rotary Club has provided continual aid to the village, ensuring that village girls no longer grow up to become involved in the sex profession. They have also helped educate the villagers about safe hygiene practices and, among other things, have provided access to hospital where diseases can be treated rather than becoming fatal.

On our visit to the Mlop Children's Centre, we learned of its programs to keep families together and provide training for parents. Parents are able to get jobs and earn enough to provide for their families, instead of giving their children up to the orphanages or selling them. We got to meet many of the families the centre has helped and continues to help. After we got home I had several questions for Katie:

WHY DID YOU TAKE ON THE CHALLENGE OF TAKING YOUR





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It was initially started to explore Australia and raise money for charities in Australia but it was always a goal of mine for it to make a name for itself internationally.

CANNONBALL CHARITY RIDES TO CAMBODIA?

I have wanted to do something like this since starting the Cannonball Charity Ride. It was initially started to explore Australia and raise money for charities in Australia but it was always a goal of mine for it to make a name for itself internationally. This year's

ride was created especially for those who wanted to go overseas. If riders went with an Australian company they may feel safer and not be on their own but with others, and we'd still be raising money for charities in the areas we would travel through. One of the riders suggested Cambodia as a place where he would want

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to go. Cambodia seemed to be the cheapest and we already had a ground contact there. It was the most cost-effective, as even with airfares on top it was affordable to people: it wasn't tens of thousands of dollars – in fact it was roughly the same price as the yearly rides we hold here in Australia. This November (2014) we are



looking to have a Snowy River ride and our next international event will be our American charity ride in September 2015.

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES FOR YOU REGARDING THIS TRIP?

The language. It was challenging to try and communicate over email; it's better by phone or Skype as you get a better feel about people. The contact we had in Cambodia spoke very good English, which made communication somewhat easier. It wasn't like the rides here though. I couldn't go and survey the route myself, so I thought we'd see more jungle and forest than we did.

(Her daughter, Shelby, who started school this year [the day after Katie got back], has gone along on a lot of the Australian surveys with her Mum).

Being my first time in Cambodia I learnt a lot about the history of the country and also logistically how the ride works ... if we go again I now know the hotels do not have elevators so I would pack very differently. Another real challenge was that when people injured themselves, neither medical assistance nor medication was easily available. Even to get Panadeine Forte

was a challenge, or to find someone who spoke English and could work out what was needed without going to hospital. We encountered this problem early in the trip as one of the riders injured himself before he even got on the bike and then again on the first day. Medical assistance being somewhat limited when out of the main city, the rider waited until he got home, only to find out he had in fact broken both his wrist and his ankle.

Katie made a reference to cheap

Cambodian alcohol not being conducive to early morning riding!

Saying all that, our guide was fantastic. We appreciated the fact that we didn't have to drive, our support vehicle was great and if there was a bike breakdown, these guys fixed it. There was certainly a challenge to find safe food to eat and drink when in villages, especially a decent breakfast. If I eat another egg I'll spit chips. Actually, if I eat another egg I'll look like a chicken! We couldn't find a proper coffee until



RIGHT



the end of the trip, either. A constant challenge was to keep remembering that we should only drink bottled water, and that we couldn't just go to the tap and fill it up. It was a challenge trying to remember every day that we mustn't brush our teeth with the tap water; a challenge to find any rubbish bins in the street (having being taught all our lives not to litter). The biggest challenge was trying to keep everything charged every night with sometimes one power point ('everything' being one laptop, four phones, two iPads, up to three normal cameras and three GoPro camera batteries).

AND YOUR BEST EXPERIENCES FROM THE TRIP?

- Our boat ride – a five-hour boat ride past, and through, river villages, with the riders and their bikes, to where we met the support vehicle – and getting to the boat!

This involved Kate, Mike (the third leg of our support crew stool) and me. We were pillion passengers, without gear, for 40 kilometres from our hotel to get to the point of departure, on roads that had seen much better days!

- Going through rubber plantations for 45 minutes – a vivid memory of miles and miles of rubber trees.
- The day that you (Sharon) and I sat in the back of the utility tray, getting the feel of what it's like to get out of the car.
- Seeing the water wells ... going to

the children's home ... and going on the boat in the Mekong river with John Mann, the founder of Educating Cambodia ... and Chanthou, the translator from Chuorph'av village.

What I didn't tell you up front was Katie's first response to my question about her best memory of this trip to Cambodia was: "The best thing during the trip was having the best PA!!!" I laughed and she said, "No, no, I mean it, I just told someone today: 'I had the best chick as a PA, Mike'."

So, there you go, I may even join Katie, and whoever is game, on one of her many future Cannonball Charity Rides. Actually America would certainly be my first choice, but the Snowy Mountains trip sounds awesome too. All the riders and support crews involved in this admirable task to help those in need have benefited: the riders were given rest, their motorbikes restored and the charities supported during their trips. They can all be truly thankful for this extraordinary woman who has acted on her urge to take on this amazing task!

