

# DICE



**M**ost motorcycle journeys start with untangling the logistics. We preach logistics first, and for good reason. Like many travelers, motorcyclists are working with a destination and a time frame, while taking into account budgetary limitations. However, Dice Travels started with an unusual premise: Allow die rolls to determine the majority of decisions faced while on a year-long, solo motorcycle trip throughout the world. The dice chose what I drank and ate, as well as what I did and where I went....





# TRAVELS

by Isaac Stone Simonelli



Like riding itself, dice can be about breaking patterns, escaping, and getting away from previously self-inflicted constraints. Too often, a trail is never taken because of fear of where it may lead. But if the die is rolled, and it points down the path, well, if it sucks it's the die's fault. More often than not, however, what's hidden ahead may be worth the risk.

Embarking on *Dice Travels*, I quit my job, sold all my belongings that couldn't be strapped to a Honda CB500X, and left my beloved girlfriend behind. With my Thai-registered bike loaded with far too much gear, my helmet sat on the table of the 346 Guesthouse with a map of Southeast Asia spread out next to it. Though it was time to hit the road, it was still unclear where I'd be going.

The corners of a tetrahedron-shaped, four-sided die were sharp against my palm and fingers. At the tip of each point is a cluster of numbers, one through four, which once thrown would dictate my next country of travel: *one* for Myanmar, *two* for Laos, *three* for Cambodia and *four* for Malaysia. I shook the single die in my cupped hands, then cast it onto the map. It tumbled, turned and spun....

In that moment, more than any other in my life, metaphysics were at play in my future: the friends I'd make, the women I'd fall





in love with, and the adventures I'd struggle through—even the food I'd eat.

The die stopped at *one*—Myanmar.

As it's been off limits for decades, Myanmar still represents unexplored Asia. With Aung San Suu Kyi's democratic movement taking power in March 2016 after 50 years of military domination, the possibility of diving deep into the country and discovering its rich, complicated history now exists in a way that was impossible until recently.

"So, do you have a visa?" a friend asked.

I laughed. "Nope. How could I have a visa when I don't know where I'm going?"

Long before this point, most serious adventure riders would have their *Carnet de Passage* sorted in case India, the Middle East or parts of Africa bobbed into view, or they would have had a fixer on the sideline ready to start sorting the logistical nightmare that is China. I didn't have enough money for any of those choices. In fact, after buying a used 2014 *Honda* in January 2016, I was only about \$5,000 away from being dead broke.

New to long motorcycle journeys, I didn't realize that it's not the cheapest way to get around. However, there's no better way to see a country, to break the ice with locals, and to challenge yourself. That said, it's cheaper to cram yourself into a minivan with backpackers and locals.

Out of Thailand via the Mae Sot border, but not into Myanmar yet, immigration brought me up to speed—yes, I had a visa and could enter, but the motorcycle wasn't allowed. Failing to have done my homework, I hadn't gotten the correct permit for the bike.

I gave the dice two options: 1. Ditch my baby and go in on foot for a month, or 2. Go back to Chiang Mai, Thailand to see if it was possible to get the paperwork sorted.

The dice did the unimaginable....

A middle-aged woman at the guesthouse where I stayed the previous night graciously promised to watch my motorcycle while I was in Myanmar. A month later, I reunited with my baby and it was off to Laos. But with more than six months left to travel, the options were quickly running out. China, Myanmar and Vietnam boxed us in. Well, technically we were not boxed, only the motorcycle. She's the one not allowed across the borders. Planning and deep pockets have their distinct advantages.

Logistics companies out of Bangkok provided a smattering of prices that weren't acceptable because they'd force me to get a job upon landing, no matter where I shipped the bike.

Solution: Sell her. It was a gut-wrenching call, but it opened up the entire world. Maybe I'd spend six months in Mongolia, Africa, or South America. I could buy a cheap bike wherever I landed. A bike shouldn't be what holds you back. Adventure riding without the exploration, without the adventure, is simply cruising. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

The dice sent me to Vietnam, where I putted around on a 100cc *Honda Win* on the rural northern loop from Ha Giang before returning to the bizarre culinary world of Hanoi.





(I recommend the snake village on the outskirts, where they serve up the beating heart of a snake with snake-blood vodka as a pre-lunch event.) Later, I ditched the \$120 *Honda Win* that was never registered in my name, for a hundred bucks.

Southeast Asia was easy. But it was time to up the ante. If I rolled an even number, I'd go to Mongolia, buy a motorcycle and take on the Gobi Desert in the middle of winter. Or an odd number and I'd head to Kenya to saddle up and explore the East Coast of the African continent.

I rolled a one.

The tightly knit overlander and motorcycling community in Nairobi advised me where to go and from whom to buy a bike once I landed in the Kenyan capital. Unable to afford anything bigger, I ended up on my very first two-stroke, an old *Yamaha DT175*. These bombproof little bikes aren't designed for touring, but if it's adventure you're chasing, I'm sure they go fast enough to catch it. (Well, after I'd talked the seller into replacing the engine block.)

But, why do it at all? Why end up on a rambling one-year trip that seemed to consistently be on the verge of disaster, when I could have had a





well-planned six-month adventure that others might still hail as a “once-in-a-lifetime” experience?

Because the best parts of any motorcycle adventure are those we don’t plan on. They’re bumping over a rocky stretch, cresting a hill and having your breath taken away by the vast, sweeping landscape of the Great Rift Valley, which stretches from Syria to Madagascar. Or, pulling over mesmerized by the thick head of cactus arms stretching up into the forever blue sky like an afro off the tree-sized trunk of a Candelabra spurge. Or coming around a bend to find a tiny Maasai compound in the arid landscape of Kenya as a flock of ostriches thump away, their raptor-like legs hurling their bodies over trampled, light brown grass.

When you travel the world, you stumble across fleeting moments like those. With the dice, every country, every tiny town, and every fork in the road holds the potential of the unexpected.

So now, having sold the *DT175* back in Kilifi, Kenya, I land in New York City. I’m now a grown man with \$45 and no credit cards, until I can afford another bike and another adventure.... **ADV**



**Isaac Stone Simonelli** is an editor, writer, diver, drone videographer and adventure rider who promotes randomizing our lives and the adventures we have in order to create serendipitous narratives. After a short career as an online poker player, Isaac spent five years working at an expat newspaper on the tropical island of Phuket, Thailand. The 32-year-old Hoosier uses dice as a mechanism for synthesizing happiness and combating decision fatigue.

