

Sri Lanka by Tuk-Tuk.... Tremendous Fun and all for a Great Cause!

Neale, Wes, Karen & Lianne are a Dubai based foursome with a passion for adventure, travelling and things 'a little less ordinary!'. They met through mutual friends in Dubai in 2008 and whether they liked it or not, got to know each other considerably better on their wonderful Sri Lankan adventure!



How did you come to be involved with The Lanka Challenge?

After reading about it in the UK's FHM magazine in December 2009 we were instantly intrigued and set out to find out more... We were impressed by the organiser's (Large Minority) set up and giggled over the previous year's participant reviews and team profiles. Frankly, we were sold and promptly signed ourselves up for the challenge in August 2010.

It is well documented that Sri Lanka as a country has faced some tough times over the last few years and in

doing the challenge, we wanted to give something back to the country and its local communities by supporting a charity close to our hearts.

We were inspired by the work that The Rainbow Centre has achieved since its opening in 2005 in helping local children to break free from a cycle of poverty that would otherwise trap them in a world of crime, begging, drug and alcohol addiction and abuse.

Having begun with 11 children, the Rainbow Centre now provides daily care and education for more than 100 children coming from an area stretching from

Deddoowa to Beruwala. The children are given education, training and two nutritious meals a day, free health care under the supervision of the Rainbow Centre's in house nurse and access to a loving supportive environment in which their rights as children are respected highly.



We were fortunate enough to visit this wonderful charity in Bentota for a few days prior to the start of the challenge where we were able to see for ourselves the wonderful work of the carers and meet the delightful children who were quick to teach us a few things about their national sport, cricket.



What did the challenge involve?

The challenge involved driving a 3 wheeled tuktuk (or rickshaw) 1100km (if you took the correct route!) around North East Sri Lanka for a total of 12 days and as if this wasn't challenging enough (!) the route involved some careful navigation of a variety of different terrains (both on and off-road!) - made worthwhile thanks to the fantastic scenery we encountered along the way - and all the while we were getting involved with the local community through a number of daily social, cultural and environmental challenges that truly encouraged us to break from the norm and open our

eyes to the wonderful nature and charm of the local Sri Lankan people.



So how did it go?

Following our tuktuk initiation and driving lesson on the first day, our humble steeds didn't seem too difficult to get the hang of around the hotel carpark... when let loose the following day on the roads of Minuwangoda enroute to Diganapathana, we were rudely awakened by what lay in store over the next 12 days!

After a challenging first day and many more kilometres than the route intended (girls team) we quickly realised that to get to each hotel checkpoint before dark we would need to step up our game - dust off our map reading skills and ask for local directions at any given opportunity (instead of waving at dazed passersby while dressed in ridiculous outfits!) The boys however, took the first day in their stride and were happily sat in the hotel lobby with a cool refreshment hours before the girls arrived!

This theme continued throughout the challenge... with the boys leading the way (their tuktuk went at least 10km/hr faster than the girls' tuktuk) and the girls following around 2 or 3 hours behind...





On the 12 day challenge, we were lucky enough to encounter a vastly different experience almost every day, adding to our growing love for this wonderful country. Our carefully planned route map saw us travel through Minuwangoda, Diganapathana, Nilaveli, Dambana, Arugambay, Wirawila, Nuwaraeliya, Kandy and Colombo, each with its own differing climate, scenery, road conditions and local communities, but with one thing in common; a new and fun experience to share with others back at the hotel every night.

Tell us about some of the challenges you had to face...

The most obvious challenge that everyone faced on a daily basis was the biggest of all; not to get lost...or go too far off route..(a regular occurrence for the girls team). The boys however, having been naturally blessed with good map reading skills from their boy scout days faced a different type of challenge; not to breakdown..and thanks to the intense pressure that they regularly applied to the tuktuk's throttle by going at full pelt every day, this happened more often than not but they still managed to beat the girls on a daily basis.



Another major challenge that everyone faced was mastering the rule of the roads (where there were actual roads!) with tuktuks near the bottom of the foodchain (trucks and buses at the top) we faced ferocious horn beeping, light flashing and being run to the edge of the road/and sometimes off road on a daily basis. Negotiating oncoming traffic on a single lane dirt road halfway up a mountain was also another test of

endurance and made Sheikh Zayed Road driving seem like a walk in the park comparatively.

The daily challenges were a great way of integrating with the local community and we were fortunate enough to experience lunch and traditional afternoon tea with a local family in their house, visiting a temple and learning some traditional buddhist monk rituals, planting trees with children at a local school, learning a local Tamil song and visiting a tea factory, among many others.



Although we all took part in the challenge for the experience, it is worth mentioning how well both teams did in the overall finishing scores. The boys clinched first place with a lead that was upheld from around Day 8 and the girls finished a respectable 10th place, being the only girls' team in the top 10. The boys were rewarded the first place prize of a pair of return flights from Dubai to Colombo, which we intend to use towards a reunion trip in the near future to see more of this wonderful country.

And of course it was a fabulously successful fundraising event...

Yes, thanks to the fantastic support of our family and friends in Dubai and in the UK and a special thanks to ExpatWoman and Mark Wilkinson Kitchens, we were able to raise more than £3000 for the Rainbow Centre Charity as well as donate some new art and reading materials to be used at the centre.



Inspired to take part in a similiar challenge? The next will be held in Cambodia, 27th Dec 2010- 6th Jan 2011. For more details check out www.cambochallenge.com