

# ON THE ROAD

## MORGAN PARKER & WHEEL2WHEEL



Wheel2Wheel founder Morgan Parker embarks on a 100-day motorbike journey across 10 Asian countries on March 1

Founder of Wheel2Wheel and motorbike enthusiast Morgan Parker is embarking on a 100-day adventure this month. The 20,000-kilometre journey will take the Hong Kong-based Australian to many scenic destinations, including Guilin in China, Halong Bay in Vietnam and Angkor in Cambodia. In each of the 10 countries he visits he will support a charity. The journey will be documented in a 10-episode National Geographic Channel television series.

Parker, standing a lean six-feet-six-inches and looking younger than his 36 years, has an eight-year-old daughter from a previous marriage. He was a successful banker and corporate real estate professional – president of Taubman Asia – prior to dedicating himself to Wheel2Wheel. For the past 18 months, he has been preparing full-time for the self-funded expedition, doing daily two-hour workouts and taking a variety of classes from self-defence and motorbike mechanics to photography.

His mission? “To raise awareness and provide financial assistance to under-recognised charities. A lot of people have the means to give and they do; what I am hoping is to give them an example of how they might take that amount of money and put it into something different,” says Parker passionately.

### BACCARAT: When did you first become interested in motorbikes?

MORGAN PARKER: My school friends rode motorbikes, but I never spent time to get a licence, as I was so focused on studying, getting good grades and a scholarship to law school. I started riding four years ago during a holiday in Australia. I have fallen off many times and sustained many injuries, but I love the sense of freedom and adventure it gives you; it's different from driving a car.

### What inspired you to create Wheel2Wheel?

The idea first occurred while watching *Long Way Round* [the television series of Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman's motorbike adventure] in 2005. I was thrilled by the escapism it presented and the opportunity to go to places to absorb the culture. At that time I wanted to challenge myself to do something physically and mentally epic. That idea was compounded by a growing desire over the past five years to build a philanthropic aspect to my life.

For the past 15 years I have worked exclusively with the objective of improving my quality of life and accruing wealth. I realised that I didn't want that to be the only chapter of my life; I wanted to develop a foundation to support charities. About two years ago, I organised this into a legal structure called the Parker Foundation. I put an amount of money into the foundation, which creates an investment return to be distributed to charities of my choice.

In the course of researching charities for the Parker Foundation I discovered many interesting causes. I developed a strong interest in grass-root charities, as opposed to large established ones that already have a lot of regular corporate donations. After discussions with many grass-root organisations, I realised how difficult it is for them to develop programs when every year they are fundraising. In 2007,

it occurred to me that I could merge these two together – I could do a trip from point A to point B visiting charities that the Parker Foundation would support.

### How did you decide which countries to ride through?

In 2008, I started to plan my route and decided to do it in Asia because I have lived and worked in seven countries in Asia over the past 15 years. First I wanted to go to all the countries I have lived in, but as that includes islands like Taiwan and Japan it became impossible. Then I had the idea that I should travel from where I'm living now – Hong Kong – to where I came from – Brisbane.

### What are some of your causes?

Wheel2Wheel is supporting 10 charities because I'm passionate about many issues. It would be easier if we just have one issue in one country; it would be far easier to communicate to people and far more manageable. I am very passionate about the environment, so half of the 10 are related to the environment but in different ways.

### What were your criteria in selecting the 10 charities?

We went through a very extensive selection process, evaluating the charities on the basis of where they are, what they are doing, how they are administered, are they tackling a very big issue – we didn't want niche issues. It took us two years to finalise the list of charities. I didn't want to fit the charities into the route. The aim was to find the charity that tackles what we felt to be the biggest issue in that country.

Ultimately I wanted to have charities that were built around brilliant individuals – small organisations that have budgets that we could really influence through our fundraising activities and increasing awareness. We didn't want faceless organisations.

I also did an outreach to about 300 people via email and asked them about any grass-root organisations that touched them or that they had volunteered for. So I had a personal connection to every organisation that we ended up with, maybe not directly but through someone I know and trust.

### What has the most challenging part of the project so far?

When you create something that's new and different to the typical impression of a charity or foundation, the hardest thing is to communicate why and what you're doing. If I was just raising money and giving it to charities, it would be easier to understand, but it wouldn't be as interesting. The idea of creating this enormous event of riding a motorbike from one part of the world to another is to create attention for the real message: the 10 charities we visit along the way.

### What is your personal goal for the expedition?

I wanted to create an experience that is culturally diverse and rewarding. I'm hoping that through creating this platform and undertaking this expedition people will look at themselves and maybe consider giving some of what they earn every year to charities. Or better yet that they create their own, or stage some event that is meaningful to them and their family, and use it as a launch pad to do something for the community.

### What are your plans after the expedition?

The immediate plan is to deliver the television broadcast, as it will give the charities the awareness that they so desperately need. The access to new people around the world, whether online or through a television audience, will be enormously valuable to them, creating a lot of momentum that will fuel the volunteers and hopefully generate long-term donations.

Another project resulting from the expedition is a coffee table book profiling 100 portraits of eight-year-old children. I'm going to take one photograph a day; my daughter will be on the first page. I am presenting a humanitarian story on children and ethnicity changes as we travel through different communities. The message is that these children are all the same – fundamentally we are all human beings regardless of colour, circumstances, race or religion. We all share one planet, and these issues and the environment don't have borders.

Follow Parker's expedition and donate online at [www.wheel2wheel.tv](http://www.wheel2wheel.tv)

### The 10 charities supported by Wheel2Wheel

Clean Air Network **Hong Kong**  
 Animals Asia **Vietnam**  
 New Hope **Cambodia**  
 Women's Aid Organisation **Malaysia**  
 Action For Change Foundation **Timor-Leste**  
 Gecko **China**  
 Child's Dream **Laos**  
 Baan Gerda **Thailand**  
 Paneco **Indonesia**  
 Nailsma **Australia**