

*Connect caught up with ex-journalist Jack Leenaars on his cycling venture in New Delhi in the 21 Sept 2012 issue. Connect spoke to him about what has happened since then and his take on the India experience.*

*What have been the developments at Delhi by Cycle since 2012 since we last spoke? What are the new tours and additions to the project?*

Since 2012 (past 3 years) DelhiByCycle (DBC) has grown and developed into a professional company (Jack's Adventures Pvt. Ltd.) that is involved in offering experiential tours in Delhi and cycling consultancy in India. We managed to get KLM as a valuable partner on board as the sponsor of our bicycles (Dutch connect). The core tour activity remains the guided bicycle tours with DelhiByCycle. Apart from the bicycle tours we added one more experience: Trek with Jack. A beautiful wildlife trek / nature walk in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary. As consultants we have started a partnership with Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department. We are using our cycling expertise in developing bicycle experiences. It means exporting the successful model of DelhiByCycle to other cities in India, to start with Lucknow.

*What are the challenges that you face and how do you plan to overcome them?*

Challenges: every company always has the internal challenges (team management, realizing company ambitions etc) and external challenges (market developments etc). One challenge related to both is getting a visa. Getting a business visa-one year max! How can you run a business based on one year security that you can stay and work in the country? The complexity for our clients of getting a tourist visa for India which makes it a less attractive tourist destination compared to countries as Thailand and Indonesia. We have to deal with this situation. Soon India will offer visa-on-arrival for tourists, which could be a huge improvement. A long term business visa (for example 5 years) seems unrealistic, even though my wife and me have been living and working for more than 11 years in India.

*What have been the key achievements of Delhi by Cycle since 2012?*

Key achievements: DBC have been proclaimed the highlight for Delhi when it comes to tour experience by the prestigious Lonely Planet. Tripadvisor have awarded DBC 3 continues years with the Certificate of Excellence. For me the best result is that we have been performing on a continuous high quality level which is a huge challenge in a difficult environment as Delhi. Business is growing, number of clients is growing, and satisfaction level of clients is high. The consultancy work is a great

new step. All the knowledge and expertise of the past years we can start sharing with other places as well.

*Has the business climate changed since the coming of the new government? What is your take on the ease of doing business in India?*

Business climate: mostly expectations have changed. But it seems India is opening up to more business initiatives. For sure Modi government has improved the mind set. There's a positive flow again. From visa-on-arrival, the swachh bharat mission, the endless stream of foreign heads of states and trade missions including The Netherlands. They all understand times have changed finally again, there's something to gain again in India. That's the hype aura around PM Modi, but the reality of doing business remains the same. It wasn't easy, it's not easy and it will never be easy. Most people / companies underestimate the powers and weaknesses of India which can lead both to high levels of frustrations and low results.

*Has the perception of Delhiites changes about cycling tours?How do you ensure safety in the traffic conditions of Delhi?*

Cycling is becoming more of an agenda point in the urban development / mobility discussion in Delhi and other Indian cities. The discussion is there, initiatives are there (Raahgiri for example and many cycling clubs), but cycling is still not considered as a respectable and do-able mode of transport. With reason in this stage of Delhi development as cycling facilities in the city are extremely poor with limited road safety as a result.

*In retrospect, what would you like to change if you could? What is your wishlist for the future?*

Policy makers have to initiate and implement required changes. Not alone, as it should be a consortium of different stake holders like corporates, civil society, individuals. For example the Delhi metro is an extremely successful project, the lifeline of Delhi. But connecting the stations to the residents and/or offices is poor. A cycling scheme could be an excellent solution. Car free zones at places like Hauz Khas Village and inner circle of CP could be looked at. Delhi has to learn to develop and implement from A to Z and not from G to U (starting somewhere and ending somewhere).