

Surgeon writes book about motorcycle journey from Singapore to Sweden to raise breast cancer awareness

Long Ride to overcoming odds



✓ **ZAIHAN MOHAMED YUSOF**

On March 18, 2014, two surgeons from the National University of Singapore Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine set off to ride their dual-purpose motorcycles from Singapore to Sweden.

Their 23,000km journey, which took more than 100 days, passed through 17 countries, including Thailand, China, Iran and Kazakhstan, raised funds and awareness on issues surrounding breast cancer in Asia and sealed collaboration deals.

Last week, The New Paper caught up with one of the surgeons, Associate Professor Philip Iau, at the launch of his book, *The Long Ride From Singapore*.

It is a diary of sorts, documenting the on-the-road challenges and the people that Prof Iau and fellow surgeon Mikael Hartman faced on their journey.

The pair attended medical

conferences and spoke to breast cancer survivors on their route north.

Prof Iau told TNP that the weather was the “biggest teacher”. He described a day in Xinjiang, China, which started at 19 deg C, dropped to sub-zero temperatures at one point and eventually rose to 23 deg C, so “don’t stint on a good riding kit”.

He rode a Suzuki V-Strom while Associate Professor Hartman, a Swede, was on a BMW R1200GS.

The duo enjoyed beautiful scenery, from snow-capped mountains and lush green terraced hills in China to desert landscapes in Kazakhstan.

They learnt some repair skills before the journey, but there were issues the riders could not have anticipated.

For example, they learnt it was wiser to hide rather than ride in unpredictable sandstorms, which they and their support crew, who were in a 4x4 pickup, got caught in.

During sandstorms, strong winds can turn debris into flying shrapnel. Just 80km outside Al-



Associate Professor Philip Iau with the book on their journey from Singapore to Sweden.

TNP PHOTO: **ZAIHAN MOHAMED YUSOF**

maty in Kazakhstan, the mother of all storms struck the riders.

Visibility was poor, it was wet and cold, and Prof Iau barely avoided flying golfball-sized debris that bounced off his motorcycle windscreen.

Both riders, who had refused to leave their motorcycles behind, took shelter overnight at a cottage, where the host treated them to a home-cooked meal.

Said Prof Iau: “The hospi-

talitly we got just about everywhere we went was really heartwarming. In Central Asia, it is a part of the culture to take care of the sojourner...”

“The biggest and most pleasant surprise was Iran.”

For some reason, in Iran, Prof Hartman and another team member were “repeatedly dragged into wedding parties”.

Yet, *The Long Ride* could have ended prematurely as Prof

Iau started experiencing panic attacks on the road.

In China, he considered leaving his Suzuki on the back of the pickup and continuing the rest of the journey on four wheels.

He said: “I had never had panic attacks before and quite honestly have never been this frightened before.”

But advice from Prof Hartman and a close friend gave him the courage to saddle up again.

His decision to continue riding was “in a small way, like women going for cancer treatment – facing the fear”.

For more of the surgeons’ adventures, *The Long Ride From Singapore* is available at Kinokuniya, Amazon, Times and Book Depository.

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