

## Of lenses and lentils in India

12.04.2019, Episode 52

### Owen in China

Hello, this is Owen and this is my podcast for Friday 12th April, 2019. How are you all doing? I'm back in India this month. I'm on the edge of the desert in Kutch in Gujarat. Since I got here it's been over 40 degrees every single day. The highest we reached was 45. It's so hot and so dry that my contact lenses are drying out while I wear them.

Today, I'll tell you why that's been a bit of a problem and I'll proclaim [1] my love for Indian food.

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Not long after I arrived in India I met a group of four tourists. They'd purchased [2] two second-hand Royal Enfields. A Royal Enfield is the quintessential [3] Indian motorbike. Although it was originally manufactured in England, it's now very much synonymous [4] with India. You see them all over India. They have a beautiful, classic look to them, sort of in the vein of [5] a Harley Davidson. I suppose they're ideal for long-distance road trips. I say ideal because they look quite comfortable. I must confess [6], though, that I have no idea really. I'm not really interested in motorbikes. But I do like the look of these Royal Enfields. The group of tourists I met were travelling all across India on their Royal Enfields. A great idea no doubt, but I couldn't help wondering whether it's actually that much fun driving on the roads across India. A Royal Enfield might be incredibly comfortable but I should explain something about driving in



India. Whenever I'm here, I get around [7] on a scooter. I drive out to different villages in the area most days and I can tell you it's not very relaxing. Sometimes it almost feels like I'm in a video game, collecting points for avoiding all the dangers along the way. First of all, there are all the animals you share the road with. The cows are the easiest to drive around. They're big and easily visible and they move very slowly. They do, however, cross the road wherever and whenever they want. The stray dogs [8] are similar to the cows in their disregard [9] for traffic rules but they're a lot faster and more unpredictable. They sit by the side of the road and then suddenly, out of the blue [10], decide to run across the road. You always have to keep an eye on the dogs. The animals that are trained to be a little more respectful of traffic rules are the camels, the donkeys and the goats. They do use the roads like we do, to get from A to B, but they stick to [11] the correct side of the road at least. There's also the condition of the roads themselves. Most roads around here aren't too bad, but you have to remain very vigilant [12]. Potholes [13] are not uncommon and there's a lot of sand and rubble [14] from unfinished construction work. But the most perilous [15] of all are the unmarked speed bumps [16]. The way they enforce speed limits here is by randomly placing speed bumps every now and again. Imagine driving along on your scooter when it's over 40 degrees - it's so hot the road is all blurry and looks like it's about to melt. There's so much sand and dust your contact lenses are drying out and you're trying to keep an eye out for dogs. And then out of nowhere...boom! You hit a speed bump. There's no sign to warn you, it just appears. If you drive down the same roads every day, you very quickly start to make a note of the location of all the speed bumps. If all the animals and the state of the roads aren't enough of a hazard [17], there's also the traffic to consider. Everything from tuk tuks to buses to trucks and nobody seems to follow any rules. You can overtake on the left or the right as long as you honk. Sometimes I even get confused about whether I should be driving on the left or the right side of the road. There's one road I find myself on quite regularly that's almost a proper motorway. There are two lanes in each direction with a barrier down the middle. Along that road it's not uncommon to see a huge truck driving down the wrong side of the road. They do always drive very slowly, though, in order to give everyone driving in the correct direction plenty of time to swerve [18] out of the way. When I mentioned this to an Indian friend, he just laughed and said: "Ah yes, truck drivers in India, they're all alcoholics."

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Does anyone remember the 5 a day advice? A healthy diet supposedly includes five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. I always found it very unappealing and uninspiring advice. As if I should limit myself to five individual portions of fruit and veg. Somebody once told me about the advice given by the Japanese health authorities. The advice in Japan used to be to eat 30 different food items each day. It sounds much more appealing than 5 a day. Perhaps not surprisingly though they don't advise this anymore in Japan. They were worried that people were eating too much in their goal to eat 30 different kinds of food every day. Be that as it may [19], I still think it's more appealing advice because who doesn't like a bit of variation in their diet. One of the reasons I love the food so much here in India is because you get lots of variety. The standard lunch here is called a thali, which is a set meal. Basically a thali consists of a large stainless steel plate the size of a tray with lots of little stainless steel bowls on it. Each little bowl contains something different. The more expensive the thali, the more little bowls you get. So, for example, the place I often go to for lunch serves a very basic and cheap thali that consists of the following: a little bowl of daal, which is a lentil soup, three bowls with different curries - one with pulses [20], one with potato and one with mixed vegetables - a little bowl of yoghurt, a salad consisting of cabbage, red onion, tomato and carrot, Indian lime and mango pickles, chapati bread and rice. To drink you get salty buttermilk, which might not sound very nice but trust me it goes very well with Indian food. The general rule with thalis is that you get to eat until you're full. They just keep filling up your little bowls with more daal and curries and they keep giving you more fresh chapatis until you tell them to stop. I probably get close to 30 different kinds of food just for lunch. But I also probably eat far too much.

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That's just about it for this month. As always, thank you for listening. You can listen to all our episodes by downloading our app or on our website [podclub.ch](http://podclub.ch). Remember that you can also download our vocabulary trainer and you can find us on Instagram. I'll be back on 10th May with more stories from India. Until then, take care everyone. Goodbye!

### Glossar: Owen in China

[1] **to proclaim:** to announce, to state publicly

[2] **to purchase:** to buy

[3] **quintessential:** perfectly typical or representative

[4] **synonymous:** if two things are synonymous, it means there's a close connection between them and you can't think of one without thinking of the other

[5] **in the vein of:** similar to

[6] **to confess sth.:** to admit to sth.

[7] **to get around:** to go or travel to different places

[8] **stray dog:** a dog without a home

[9] **disregard:** the attitude of not respecting sth. or considering it important

[10] **out of the blue:** happening in a way that is sudden and unexpected

[11] **to stick to sth.:** here: to continue to do sth.

[12] **vigilant:** watching very careful

[13] **pothole:** a hole in the road

[14] **rubble:** bricks and stones that have fallen off buildings or walls

[15] **perilous:** very dangerous

[16] **speed bump:** a raised area across the width of a road that forces drivers to drive more slowly

[17] **hazard:** something that could be dangerous or cause an accident

[18] **to swerve:** to change direction suddenly, often in order to avoid sth.s

[19] **be that as it may:** expression used to say that even if something is true, it doesn't affect your opinion

[20] **pulses:** seeds that you can cook, for example beans, lentils or peas