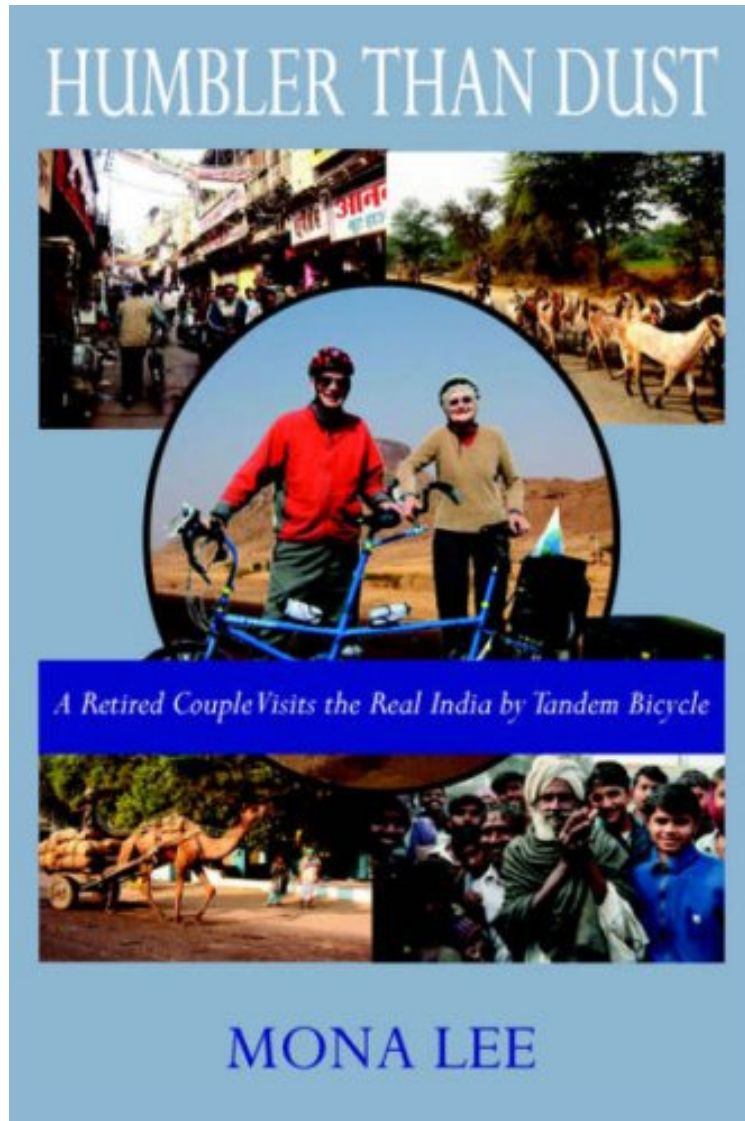


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Humbler Than Dust: A Retired Couple Visits The Real India By Tandem Bicycle

Mona Lee

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Mona Lee : Humbler Than Dust: A Retired Couple Visits The Real India By Tandem Bicycle before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Humbler Than Dust: A Retired Couple Visits The Real India By Tandem Bicycle*:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Well written view from street level By Linda Blanchard The writing in "Humbler Than Dust" illuminates India with the glow of Mona Lee's own inner light. The degree to which we learn

about Mona as much as India is quite remarkable, and not in a self-serving ego-feeding way at all, but through that very "humbler than dust" clear-eyed honesty that Gandhi meant when he wrote the quote that gave the book its title. I can only imagine that Mona would be someone I'd really enjoy hanging out with. I found out about this book while I was looking at a bike to take with me on a trip to India (which I am planning on for a few years hence). I was at folding Bike Friday's website when I spotted a mention of this book about a retired couple riding their tandem for a couple of months in India, and since I wanted to know what I'll be up against (and get tips for what to bring) I ordered the book. Drawn from Mona's diary, the story carries us from arriving at the airport and stepping out into the Indian night and unsuccessfully fending off the touts who want a piece of their action (any piece will do.. taxi? hotel recommendation? carry luggage?); through negotiating the city in auto-rickshaws and on bike.; staying with strangers met on the way and new friends met via email; sleeping in tents, or in grim hovels that pass for hotels, or fine houses; shopping at 3-sided stalls and seeking potable water; having the water bottles stolen by nomads; dealing with rough roads and many flats; and much, much more. With only a few stock phrases of Hindi, Dick and Mona are limited in their ability to communicate fluently, but this does not slow their immersion into the real life of India as they meet and eat with generous souls all along their way. Mona finds the constant scrutiny and tendency to swarm as unsettling as has every writer I've read upon first encountering the lack of privacy and personal space, and straightforward questioning of who you are and what you're about that is the norm in India (but which would seem rude and intrusive in America). Yet every word she writes is suffused with her own down-to-earth nature and respect for everyone she encounters. What impressed me even more about Mona's tale was her willingness to talk about her personal preoccupations: from cleanliness, to the warmth of a sweater, to dental floss (no longer offered for sale when she was there due to a factory closure) and theories on immunological strength, she is unafraid to state just what she thinks, and then to learn from the experiences her travels bring to her. Just as she opened herself to the lives of those she met, she opens her life to us, and we are all better for the exposure. I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in bike touring, India, or who enjoys reading travel stories. And when I go to India I will go with off-road tires, spare inner tubes and patch kits, baby wipes, cough drops, and remember to bring extra dental floss.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Older Person's India Travel Guide vs. Bicycle Travel Story By Ken Sturrock This book has some entertaining parts, but you must make sure that it's what you're looking for. Despite the bicycle theme - it is really about the kind of trials and tribulations that an older Anglo couple might face while traveling through India. The book seems to center around how to avoid scary con-artists and street vendors, using telephones when you have a hearing aid and utopian concepts of socialist world government. It does have some nice philosophical discussions. I think it would be an excellent book for people, especially older people, who have never traveled to the "developing" world and are planning to. If you are interested in bicycle travel - this is not your book.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Real People, Real Dust: Idealism with Grit By Marion R. Kee This is simply a great read. If you've ever gotten off a train in a foreign city with no idea where you will sleep that night, this is your book. If you're way too sensible to have ever gotten into that kind of situation but secretly delight in reading about how much worse it could have been if you had, this is your book. If you love India and its people; if you ride a tandem bike; if you have learned never to leave the U.S. without a good supply of dental floss--this is your book! On the other hand, if you object to not being able to put a book down until you've finished it, probably better leave this one alone. It had me in its grip until 3 AM the night I opened it, and when I was done I had to actively resist the urge to start it over again from the beginning. No ordinary travel story, this is an engagement with India as it really is, through the eyes of two Americans who are committed to living as global citizens. That they happen to be 60-something-ish is almost incidental to a story that reads at times like a picaresque narrative, at other times like a survival guide, and at all events is an account of people and places encountered through a powerful combination of open hearts and fortitude. India comes pouring through these pages, the real center of the book, and of the journey itself. The writing is almost surrealistically vivid, a fitting expression of the journey and the cultural contrasts it poses even to the seasoned traveler. Lee's narrative sets a good pace, carrying the reader along from Agra to Mumbai with a keen curiosity to find out what happens next. I could practically feel the grit in my teeth. Mona and her husband Dick are for real; idealistic enough to undertake this adventure, practical enough to survive it, courageous enough to allow it to change them. Highly recommended for all travelers, armchair and otherwise.

Dick and Mona's arrival by tandem bicycle in rural villages of India is like a circus come to town. Each time they stop, they are mobbed. Usually more than a hundred people close in around them. Or in this moving scene: ". . . Dick boldly usurps the left edge of the blacktop and lets two big trucks roar around us . . . Another truck waits behind honking indignantly in demand of room to pass between us and a loping camel cart whose driver gapes sideways at us in abject wonder. After all, in this corner of the world an old white couple on a bike is positively bizarre in contrast with the mundane appearance of a camel driver sitting on a mountain of burlap bags, his white turban bobbing up and down." They begin each day of their 1,000 kilometer journey not knowing what they will eat or where they will sleep that night. Lodging, if available at all, does not afford basic comforts taken for granted in many countries. Often there is no hotel, and they depend upon the kindness of strangers or camp out under the stars. On a visit to the Gandhi's

home museum Mona is inspired by a poignant quote from his autobiography. "The seeker after truth must become humbler than dust. Only then and not 'til then will he ever find a glimpse of truth." The story takes the seeker along on a series of horrendous and at the same time humorous adventures wherein truth is found in intimate encounters with life, people and culture at its humblest. The truth they gradually discover is that the beauty of life can best be attained by biking headlong into adversity. Dick Burkhart and Mona Lee are a retired couple trying to circumnavigate the globe by tandem bicycle and popularize the concept of a global parliament directly elected by the peoples of the world. *Humbler Than Dust* is the true story of their two-month travel adventure in India as well as their organizing escapades at the 2005 World Social Forum in Bombay. Throughout the journey they meet a host of wonderful characters who help them in many ways. They even get some help from Ganesh, the popular elephant-faced god whose spirit permeates the atmosphere of India.