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Mumbai's traffic beats French world cyclists

Xavier Boulet and Natalie Baudry are on a mission to discover the different cultures of the world

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Thirty six-year-old Xavier Boulet and his partner, 35-year-old Natalie Baudry, are on mission. In fact, they've been on a mission since the past four years. In 2003, the duo left their families, their jobs, as they put it, their lives to travel the world and the seven seas on... two bicycles! "We wanted to discover the different cultures of the world, understand its people and experience life in different parts of the world. And what better way to do so than by cycling through each city

and living like the locals," they explain, the sheer excitement of their endeavour shining through.

But wasn't it difficult to leave everything and everyone behind, and set out to discover the unknown? "It was a difficult decision to take, after all, in order to collect the money, we had to sell everything, including our house! Right now, all we've got in France is our family, their love and our two bicycles!" smiles Natalie. However, she adds on a more serious note, "But our minds were set, and we were ready to face all oppo-

sition and all challenges."

And challenges there were many, both physical and mental. From living in an apartment to shacking up in tents, from sleeping on beds to sleeping on the hard ground in tents, the two have encountered and bravely fought strong winds and freezing temperatures at 5,000 feet in the South American mountain ranges and the Himalayas. What's more, they've even lived in the midst of the thick Amazon forest, bearing up with spiders, snakes and the Amazon heat! But the two are not complaining. In fact, they say, with tired



Around the world in four years

smiles that these experiences have only made them stronger. "We've learned to adapt to any place, any situation and all kinds of people. We've become mentally and physically stronger. We can live a simple life and be happy," says Xavier.

After touring France, the couple trooped across to Africa, then South America, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, China, Tibet and are currently in India. "It was interesting to observe the Muslims in Africa, the Christians in South America, the Buddhists in Bali, and the Muslims in Malaysia. They're all so

similar, yet so different. And now, India is one multi-cultural *pot-pourrie*," says Xavier. And are they enjoying their *Bharat yatra*? Mumbai is like the Las Vegas of USA. It's an interesting city, with a great heritage and very, very curious people!" laughs Natalie, who admits she loves the basic Indian meal of *dal*, *chapatis* and vegetables. Xavier, however, finds Indian food too spicy. "But it's delicious," he adds. What they find the most strenuous — and amusing at times too — is Mumbai's traffic. "It's quite difficult to ride here. The roads are not in great condition and

the traffic is too much. But it's just another challenge," smiles Xavier.

After India, they will be crossing over to Dubai, then Istanbul, after which they will cycle around Europe and then, by November, head back to home sweet home. "There's good and bad in each country, in every culture. We imbibe what's good and ignore the bad. Yet, we believe we've seen only a part of the world, there's still so, so much more to discover," feels Xavier. "We've not just discovered the world, we've even re-discovered ourselves! But now, we want to go back home..." they smile.