



Traveller's tales: A desert oasis, Krista on a buffalo, and in front of a desert dwelling

Two-wheeled traveller's adventure of a lifetime

By ALICE JONES

FRIENDS and family said she was crazy, but not even intrepid Krista Bernard could imagine the dangers she faced riding a bicycle from Australia to the UK. Krista left home in 1996, a 24-year-old idealist keen to see the world.

In January she returned, having made it as far as Egypt, full of frightening and moving stories.

Five days in an Iranian prison, a private meeting with the Dalai Lama, dead bodies in the Ganges and accusations of spying in Libya — Krista experienced it all.

"I couldn't conceive how vulnerable I would be," she said.

"I was very naive."

Krista's determination has won her a nomination for Young Adventurer Of The Year in the Australian Geographic Awards, being presented tomorrow.

In her time away there were many close calls.

The most terrifying moments came in Iran where she narrowly escaped being raped and was later sent to prison for having "bad intentions".

"We were walking down a street and these police came up and started pushing (us) around," Krista recounts.

"They suddenly bundled us into a police car and started asking us all these questions.

"I was put in an Islamic prison. I was in there for five days.

"You realise that your nice little secure world which you think you know, you actually don't know at all.

"I feel really lucky to be living in



Wedding banquet: Krista (centre) joined the party at a Khmer ceremony

Australia where there is justice, sanity and people to keep the law."

What touched Krista most was the incredible hospitality shown to her by so many people.

A white woman cycling alone, through villages rarely visited by Westerners, caused a sensation.

"I stopped in villages which would hardly ever see foreigners so they were excited to see me," she said.

Krista stayed seven months in Cambodia, teaching English and

yoga. "I kept getting sidetracked by the lure of other places," she said.

"From Cambodia I thought I may as well go to Vietnam, Laos and India — I found it fascinating.

"I studied yoga in India for five months and had the chance to meet the Dalai Lama, which was one of the most humbling experiences of my life."

By India, Krista's funds had dwindled to just \$600, but she decided to keep going.

"I just trusted everything would work out. I love seeing what happens," she said.

"I was down to my last \$50 when I got a job working on luxury Turkish sailboats."

From Turkey Krista planned to go to Eastern Europe but the cold weather made the Middle East a more attractive option.

She peddled on through East Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Egypt and up to the Libyan border.

But there, border police would

not let her cross. They suspected she was a spy and sent her away.

It was the beginning of the end. When Krista returned to Cairo her bicycle was stolen and the adventurer decided to go home.

"I felt a bit let down, I always had a dream to complete my trip in a certain way," she said.

The Spirit of Adventure Exhibition, which features Krista's stories and those of other travellers, opens tomorrow at the Sydney Arcade.