

Having a Scooter in Thailand by Adeline Brown

Don't be scared!

One of the biggest things that I was concerned about when moving my life to Thailand, was the fact that I would have to drive a scooter.

I had never ridden one before and this made me nervous, not only because they are more dangerous than driving a car, but also because Thai traffic is notoriously horrendous. I had sent emails to various current teachers asking if a scooter was really a necessity, and whilst I hoped the answer would be no, I was not surprised that their response was yes. Surat Thani is too small for a car, but too big (and too hot!) to walk. But it's just perfect for a scooter.

I thought driving a scooter was going to be hard, and that my life would be at risk every second that I would be driving it. On both accounts, I was very wrong. This article, I hope, will calm the nerves of incoming teachers like me, by telling you that I now love driving my scooter. It will also give you some helpful hints about staying safe and looking after your scooter when you're here.

Buying (and selling) a bike

The first step for buying your bike should be leaving teachers. You can trust that they are a truthful, reliable source. Plus, this way you can be sure that you have one sorted for as soon as you arrive, which is something I was certainly extremely grateful for. It's not easy or quick to get around Surat by foot, and exploring is what you're going to want to do ASAP. So to have a bike sorted beforehand is ideal. You can see scooters for sale on the Surat Thani Buy and Sell facebook page, or on the Super English Surat facebook page. And this no doubt will be where you will eventually sell yours, too. Here is the link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/631687166873790/>

Let's be serious - Staying safe

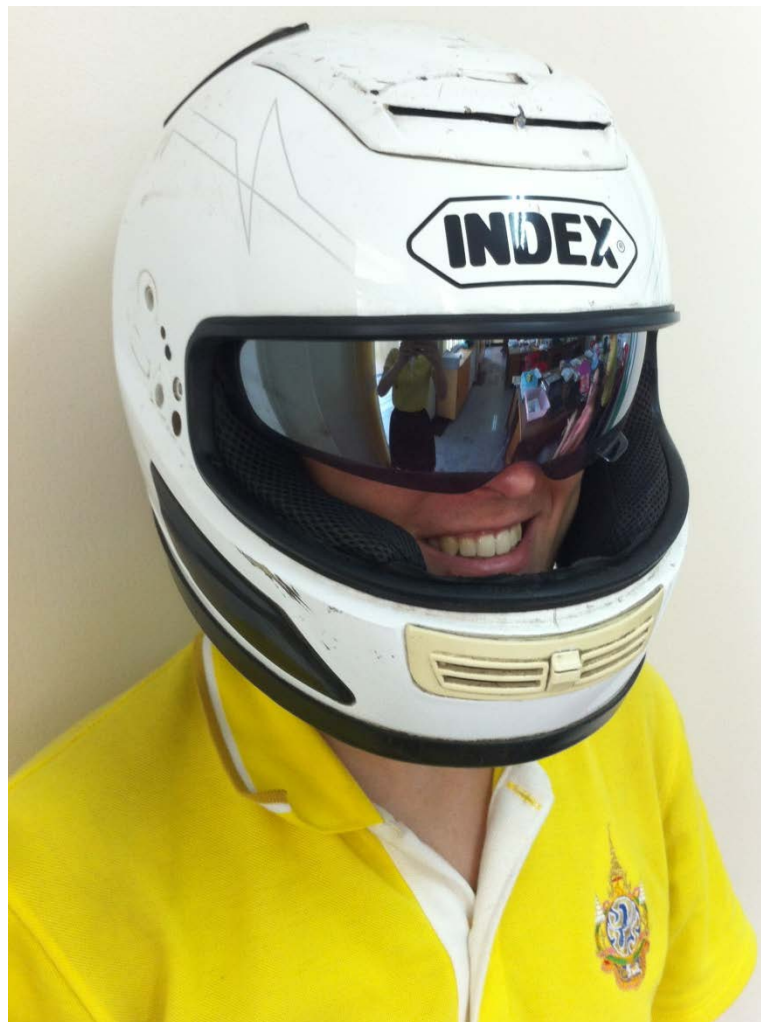
Contrary to what I thought, driving a scooter really is not hard at all. They are nippy little things, and you can control them very easily. It is therefore tempting to go fast, swerve through traffic dangerously, do risky overtakes and other show-off manoeuvres on the roads. There is a lot of this in Thailand... and there are a lot of accidents in Thailand. To avoid being in one simply stay safe on the roads, its common sense.

Although Surat is small and a trip to the nearest watering hole is a mere 3-5 mins drive away, do not be tempted to drink and drive. There have been many bumps, scrapes, near misses and minor accidents with some teachers this year (not too severe thankfully) that could all have been avoided if only there was a designated driver or they had the sense to put themselves in a tuk-tuk. You might think that you are 'OK', but don't forget if it's late on Friday night you will not be the only one tipsy on the roads. Don't risk it people!

I'm not going to say that every time you drive you should wear full length trousers and wear trainers and cover your body as much as possible. Because in reality no-one does this around Surat, and I'd

be a hypocrite. However, on longer journeys out of town, you must. It is much, much more dangerous on the highway, and flip flops, shorts and a tee are not OK. This year I witnessed a very nasty accident when driving on the highway with another teacher. She was in front of me and was flown off her bike by a pot hole. Not nice. She was wearing long shorts but she now has very large scars down her legs and arms where she was not protected. If she was wearing trousers or jeans and a jacket she'd look different now. This story is not meant to scare you, it was an unfortunate accident, but it is meant to warn you. Long journeys = cover up.

Finally, it is imperative that you always, always wear a helmet. In the story above, her helmet had a huge crack following the accident. That could have been her head. Even on the shortest journeys, you must wear one –even an accident at a slow speed can be fatal without a helmet. A decent helmet with a mouth guard is preferable, as Eric is modelling beautifully in the picture below. If you are buying second hand, make sure there are no major cracks that could have damaged the integrity of its structure.



I hope this has been enough to warn you without scaring you! There are many, many teachers driving three or four times a day every day but there have been very few incidents. Driving in Surat is fun, easy and safe... just be careful. Simple.

Looking after your bike

To keep your scooter working well, there are some things you need to do regularly. Thankfully, there are garages on almost all the streets in Surat. So you will never be too far from essential services and maintenance. Here's what you should be doing...

You should clean your scooter bi-weekly. Not only does it make it look great, it also keeps all the cogs and thingys working smoothly. Bonus. This costs only around 50 baht.

You should change the oil monthly, to avoid your bike crapping out on you. This costs around 100-120 baht.

You should pump up the tyres weekly. This is free. Lovely.

If ever your scooter 'feels different' or 'sounds funny', you should take it to a garage immediately. Do not wait for the moment it stops working and you have to push it to get it fixed. Believe me, this is not fun. And it could cost more in the long run than a quick fix as soon as you sense something's off.

Gas is super cheap - you can fill a tank for anywhere between 80-150 baht depending on the size of the tank. And on average this can last for 5 days.

If ever you do have any work done to your bike you should always keep the receipts. I'm not talking about washes/tyre pumps here, but the more major jobs like a new battery, changing the lights, a new seat or a complete re-ramp. This will be helpful if ever you need to go back if the bike continues to have the same problem, and is also useful when selling your bike again to prove that it's been well looked after.

Lastly, a note on theft. It doesn't happen often, but it does happen. So here's what you should do to prevent it. All scooters have a lock system, which locks the front tyre at an angle to avoid thieves wheeling it away. On most scooters, when you pop open the seat there is a little latch where you can attach your helmet and lock it in, too. You should do both these things when not using your scooter to discourage nasty robbers. If you can lock your bike behind a gate at night, even better.

The legal stuff

The legal (boring) stuff. When you purchase your bike, it should come with a 'green book' – which is the bike registration and is essentially its entire life history. It says the engine number, colour, year, make of the bike along with the current owner's name and address. It is a legal document that you will have to produce if you are ever stopped by the police. It will likely be in the previous owner's name, but should be converted to your name as soon as your teachers licence comes through. Your bike will also be insured/registered up to a certain date. When this date is reached, it needs to be extended. For both these things, the green book and the insurance/registration, as well as upgrading your tax you need to go to the Land Transport Office- preferably with the previous owner. The office is on Kanjanawitee Road, here is a link:

<https://plus.google.com/105251685518494874053/about?hl=th>

If you need to check any details in the green book, here are a couple of pictures to help you out.



ใบคู่มือจดทะเบียน

Plate number for the bike

รถ	راجการยานยนต์
เลขทะเบียน	1กฉ 874
จังหวัด	สุราษฎร์ธานี
เลขทะเบียน	จังหวัด
เลขทะเบียน	จังหวัด
เลขทะเบียน	จังหวัด

Province that bike is registered in.

เลขที่ จย. 55- 0619877

ขส.บ.10 ท.-4

รายการจดทะเบียน		Plate number	
วันจดทะเบียน	12 มิถุนายน 2552	เลขทะเบียน	1กฉ 874
ประเภท	راجการยานยนต์	(รย. 12)	ลักษณะ
ยี่ห้อรถ	HONDA	แบบ	ICON
สี	ดำ เทา	เลขตัวรถ	NC110CS-0027536
ยี่ห้อเครื่องยนต์/มอเตอร์	HONDA	เลขเครื่องยนต์/มอเตอร์	NC110CSE-0027536
อยู่ที่	ชัยเพชรียง	ชื่อเพลิง	เบนซิน
จำนวน	1 สูบ 108	ซีซี	แรงม้า/กิโลวัตต์
น้ำหนักรถ	กก.	น้ำหนักบรรทุก/น้ำหนักลงเสา	กก.
น้ำหนักรวม	กก.	ที่นั่ง	2 คน
0619877			
ผู้ถือกรรมสิทธิ์		เจ้าของรถ	
เลขที่บัตร	18-10100045937	วันที่ครอบครองรถ	3 กรกฎาคม 2557
ที่อยู่	11079 หมู่ 3 ถนนสายอุทกทะเล ต.มะขามเตี้ย อ. เมือง สุราษฎร์ธานี		
ผู้ครอบครอง	Current bike owner's address.		
เลขที่บัตร	วันเกิด	สัญชาติ	โทร.
ที่อยู่	วันเกิด	สัญชาติ	โทร.
สัญญาเช่าชื่อเลขที่	ลงวันที่	ผู้ถือกรรมสิทธิ์	
ลงชื่อ	ลงชื่อ	ลงชื่อ	
เจ้าหน้าที่	นายทะเบียน		

Finally, if you do -heaven forbid - have an accident on your bike, you will be entitled to up to 5,000 baht of hospital care if you hold a debit plus card from the SCB bank. This is the bank account that Super English will help you to set up once you're here, just make sure you get the Debit Plus. Be warned – the insurance will not cover any damage to your bike or to anyone else involved in the accident. This is where a Thai licence would benefit you. It is not essential, but could come in handy in an accident that was not your fault. Otherwise, you could also be blamed for not having a licence.

X-rentals and services

I think that every single incoming teacher has (had the pleasure, I might add) of dealing with X. X is a lovely Thai guy in town with great English, who is married to an equally lovely Canadian called Reffa. X owns 'X-rentals and services', and can help you with anything to do with your scooter. He has among other things translated receipts for me, changed oil, given his professional opinion about any problems with my bike and also translated on the phone to mechanics whilst getting my bike seen to. He and Reffa are angels and have always been so kind and eager to help with anything and everything, bike related and otherwise. So if in doubt, talk to X. If he cannot help, he will at least point you in the right direction. (He and Reffa can be found on the buy and sell facebook page).

A last word

Hopefully this article has succeeded in calming the nerves of incoming teachers a little anxious about driving a scooter. I also hope you'll find this a useful checklist of things to do before and whilst you own a bike. As I said, driving is easy, and it can be great fun too. Liberating. But just stay safe and always, always be careful.