

Small Town, Big World: The Wheels On the Bus Go... uh, wait... There is No Bus

By Britt Benson Steele

Kids all over the world attend school. Some things are the same. Some things are different.

School is a topic that is easy to make a straight across comparison to the United States. When we traveled to India and Bali, the school children, their uniforms and ways of being caught my attention and inspired me to take pause.

One of the things that touched me is how the students play such an important role in the culture of the place. I'll offer up two examples: The first is from India. The students there, all in identical uniforms, do not ride a school bus. Instead, they ride a "rickshaw," which is like a covered ATV vehicle. Generally, a rickshaw serves as a taxi during normal business hours. However, come time to travel to and from school, they second as school buses. Drivers do not receive payment during these times, and simply take it upon themselves to contribute to society by taking children to and from school. With this as a general practice, they each load their vehicle with children and everybody does a small part. If, however, you need a taxi at the same time a school transport is en route, you might wait 15 minutes or so and decide to begin walking in the direction of where you are going, in the hopes that a rickshaw driver will be available for at least part of your journey.

I remember smiling big when a rickshaw would stop and out hopped 8, 10, or 12 kids from a vehicle designed to hold three to four passengers plus driver. The kids were always laughing, dressed



the same and not bothered in the least by being crammed tightly into a tiny little vehicle. The laughter came pouring out of the open doors of the rickshaw each time it rolled up.

In Bali, there are no rickshaws. Instead, children either walk to and from school or hop on the back of the family motorbike. With similar tolerance for close quarters, Balinese families are known to load 3-5 people on a single seat motor bike without hesitation. Similar to India, children wear their matching uniforms. In India, the children dressed as if they were attending an English boarding school, while in Bali, the uniforms tend toward bright colors,

An especially unique practice in Bali is the honor and respect for Saraswati, the goddess of education, music, and the arts. The students offer their gratitude by bringing their brooms with them to school once a week and taking on the responsibility for cleaning the school. There are no janitors in Balinese schools. The children do this work, and as they grow, this translates naturally into a morning village practice of cleaning the streets.

And so, the wheels on the bus... well, they DON'T go.... for there is no bus, and the lessons the children learn while at school are cultural and communal. And, the adults do their part, whether they are in Indonesia or India. Adults realize that if they want the kids to get to school, they need to take them. And if they want the village to be clean, they need to clean it. There is no bus. There is only "us."

Where Do You Read The Voice?



Jim and Kathy Eckland took the Voice with them on a recent vacation and stopped in Cave Creek, AZ.



Tobie Finzel read the Voice during a recent vacation in front of the hot air coming out of Kilauea on Hawaii.

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