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# Stray kitten turns solo bike trip into an adventure for two

Cyclist Dean Nicholson found a kitten as he traveled across Europe. He brought her along for the ride.



Nala, a cat Dean Nicholson found while biking through Bosnia, watches hot air balloons in Cappadocia, Turkey. Nicholson had planned a months-long solo trip through Europe and Asia, but he ended up with a furry sidekick. (Dean Nicholson)

By **Andrea Sachs**

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When Dean Nicholson set off to bike from his home in Scotland to Thailand, he packed a tent, sleeping bag, stove, hammock and sound system for his music. A few months into his adventure, he had to make room for additional supplies, such as toys, a harness and a doll-size umbrella. But the new items weren't for him. They were for his riding partner, a kitten he had rescued on his journey.

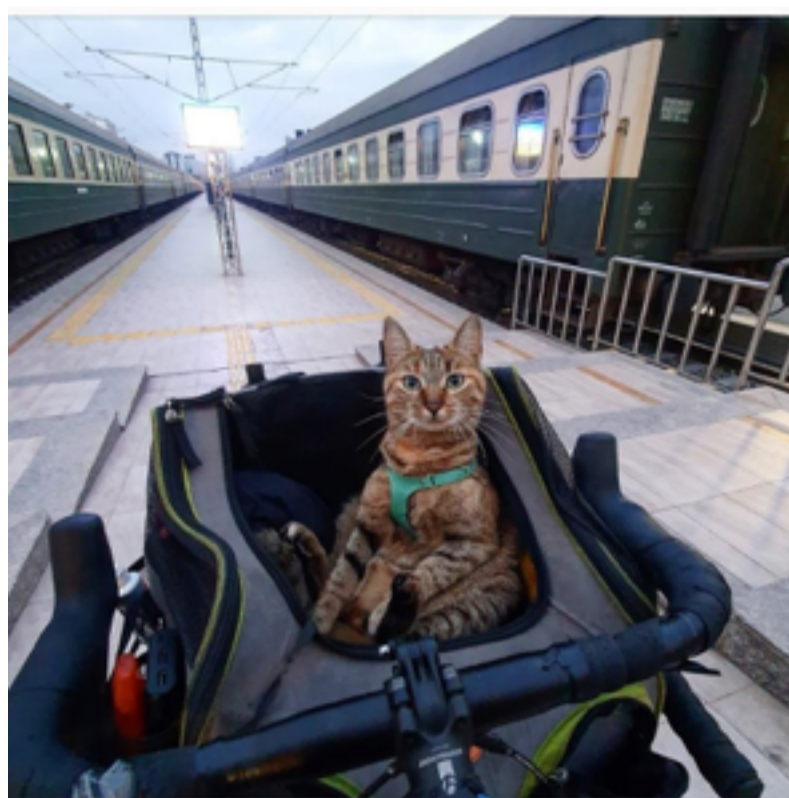
While cycling through Bosnia in southeastern Europe, he noticed a tiny gray-and-white kitten running after him, meowing for him to stop. He hopped off his bike and fed her red pesto sauce from his food stash. He decided to take her to a vet in the nearest town to see if anyone had lost their pet. No one had, so he placed her in the basket attached to the front of his bike and pedaled toward the border of Montenegro. The kitten tried to escape, but not to run away: She just wanted a better seat.



Nala and Nicholson are in Saranda, Albania, during a 2019 stop on their long bike ride. The two have visited more than 20 countries together, and Nicholson has written a book about the experience. (Dean Nicholson)

"She climbed up my arm and fell asleep on my shoulder behind my neck," said Nicholson, who is 32 years old and previously worked as a welder in a fish factory. "That was the moment I thought, 'she's going to come around the world with me,' because I fell in love with her instantly."

Since meeting in December 2018, the pair have visited more than 20 countries. Nala, whom Nicholson named after the lioness in "The Lion King," even has a passport. While Nicholson pedals, Nala naps in the basket, on a bed of clothes and pillows, or hangs her paws over the side, causing strangers on the street to stare in wonder.



ABOVE: Nala has traveled by bike but also by train and boat. Above, she stays in her basket at the train station in Baku, Azerbaijan, for a trip to Tbilisi, Georgia. RIGHT: In Khios, Greece, Nala waits for a ferry ride to Turkey in July 2019. (Dean Nicholson)



(Dean Nicholson)

"Having her opens up so many conversations with people," he said. "It's a talking point."

Nicholson and Nala spent their first winter together in Santorini, a Greek island. He found work as a kayak guide and discovered that Nala is a multisport kitty.

"The first time she came kayaking, she ran and jumped on the boat and sat while I paddled," he said.

After Greece, they biked through Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan and planned to cross into Iran. However, the tense political situation there, plus a law prohibiting cats in hotel rooms, forced them to turn back.

When the [coronavirus](#) pandemic hit, Nicholson parked his bike and they stayed in Hungary for 12 weeks. During their downtime, Nicholson finished his book about their escapades called "[Nala's World: One Man, His Rescue Cat, and a Bike Ride Around the Globe](#)." This fall they arrived in Austria, where Nicholson plans to stay until coronavirus travel restrictions are lifted. By spring, he hopes they can head to Russia and eventually Thailand. One of Nicholson's main reasons for picking Thailand is that he really wants to drink from a coconut. Now he will have to order two.

"She might like a coconut," he said. "If not, I will find her some cat milk."