

Six Avanti West Coast employees raise £10,000 with charity cycle across India

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A team from **Avanti West Coast** have raised over £10,000 for charity after swapping trains for bikes and completing an intense 450km ride across India.

Six Avanti West Coast employees cycled for six days in aid of the **Railway Children** charity, travelling from Agra to Jaipur.

Taking on the challenge were Rob Taylor, Food and Beverage Lead; Natalie Popat, Birmingham International Station Manager; Jim Lindsey, Business Intelligence Manager; Ryan Evans, Planning Manager; and Katie Smith and Kathy Earl, both Train Managers. They joined eight other riders from the railway industry for the fundraiser.

The route took the team through India's famous Golden Triangle, affording them breathtaking views and a unique opportunity to visit the towns and villages of Rajasthan, as well as the chance to see first-hand how the Railway Children money is being used to support young children in the country.

They also visited one of the railway help centres – set up by the Railway Children – at three of busiest stations in the Indian capital New Delhi, where volunteers work in partnership with the local police to scout for vulnerable children running away from home on trains. They are then reunited with their parents or taken into care if their family can't be found. The money raised by the Avanti West Coast group equals the amount needed to run one of these centres for four months.

Children at a school set up by the charity were also presented with pencils and colourings by the Ride India team.

Speaking after the ride, Rob Taylor said: "It was an incredible and humbling experience to be a part of. While cycling through the villages on the route, we were greeted by so many happy locals who waved and wanted pictures with us.

"Seeing first-hand the work that the Railway Children do, really brought home the importance of the money we have raised from our cycle challenge, which in itself was tough yet really enjoyable. I encourage others to get involved with future opportunities!"

Cat Howourth, Events Manager at Railway Children said: "I had the honour of supporting the Ride India challengers and I am in awe of their grit and determination to not only complete the challenge, but to raise as much for Railway Children as possible in doing so – all with the biggest smiles on their faces!

"They faced 32-degree heat, driving rain and thick fog, whilst dodging camels, cycling round goats and stopping for cattle along the 450km route. It costs around £28,000 to fund our entire project across Delhi Sarai Rohilla railway which is where we visited as part of the trip so this money makes a considerable difference to the work we do."