

Road Trip: Destination Penang



DECONSTRUCTING THE SUCCESSFUL ROAD TRIP IS SIMPLE: A GREAT CAR, GOOD COMPANY, DELICIOUS FOOD, A COMFORTABLE PLACE TO STAY, AND A SAFE JOURNEY. **NICK ATKINSON** GOT BEHIND THE WHEEL OF A NEW VOLVO XC90 T8 TWIN ENGINE AND REDISCOVERED THE PLEASURES OF THE OPEN ROAD IN MALAYSIA.

Was I ready for the weekend road trip? The Volvo XC90 T8 Twin Engine, check. My wife, Wendy, and our dog, Guinness, check. Penang cuisine for the weekend, check. Muntri Mews, a charming pet-friendly hotel, check. And I was ready to go.

Picking up the car must have been amusing for the gentleman passing over the keys, as the 'kid in a toy shop' look on my face as I sat in the driver's seat most definitely showed. This was easily the newest and most advanced car I have ever driven,



and truth be told, the array of buttons and displays was almost intimidating! After giving it a few minutes, I found it to be intuitive, but with an engine that quiet on starting, you have to take the electronic panel's word for it. I suppose it's down to what you're used to, and I was already enjoying getting used to this new Volvo. When I put down the third row of seats to open up the boot, I realised that my bag of golf clubs would fit comfortably within and not even touch the sides! Plenty of room for the weekend away.

I must begin the story, though, with the almost armchair feel of the driving seat. Not enough to make you put up the feet and snooze, but all-supporting and generous and, with a little bit of fine tuning, a virtually perfect driving position. I entered the destination in the in-car GPS. Our ETA was calculated and all looked in order. For backup, I checked Waze and presto, pretty much the same. The car is called the T8 Twin Engine, and as I had only heard the term "hybrid" before, this added to the intrigue. It is true though, the car has two engines. There's a 316bhp turbo supercharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine at the front that drives the front wheels. And then at the

back, driving the rear wheels, there's an 86bhp electric motor. In between is where the batteries live.

The batteries can be charged from the mains, or by the petrol engine and braking systems as you drive along. So, remember I said it was all about what you were used to? Well, with a twin engine car there is a lot to understand in the different driving modes, and so with the battery only at a low level it was suggested that I use the hybrid mode for the journey. I wasn't going to argue, and the road trip began.

Motoring innovation and Volvo are synonymous and there are numerous gizmos and gadgets that could be utilised in the application panel of the on-board display. For now I made sure that the Intellisafe functions were on, namely the city safety, pedestrian and cyclist detection, park assist, front and rear

collision warnings. The twin vision of safety and technology was evident in the car's design, and let's just say that the Volvo goal stating that 'by 2020, no one should be killed or seriously injured in a new Volvo car' resonated as I pulled away from the curb.

Take a moment to appreciate that this car, which is almost five metres long and weighs 2 1/2 tons, accelerates from 0 to 100kph in 5.6 seconds. Off the line, you can put your foot down, and the rush of adrenaline (and in my case, perhaps a bit of testosterone) that kicks in is wonderful.

Once on the highway, there wasn't a stretch of road – not a surface, a hill, or an incline – that even remotely stopped this beautiful beast of a car (excuse the terminology, Volvo, but she is!) from moving at whatever speed I wanted. Adding to that the lack of noise and the



sense of motoring

solidity of the drive made it one of my more memorable experiences behind the wheel. Even my wife, who insisted she was going to drive after we passed Ipoh, was amazed by the smooth ride.

Typical Friday afternoon traffic meant the journey was a bit longer than expected, but the XC90 made the time behind the wheel plenty enjoyable. I was looking forward to getting to our hotel in Penang for the weekend, especially as it catered for our travelling companion, our dog, Guinness. Her needs are simple: lots of hugs, food, and somewhere to sleep. Muntri Mews (georgetownheritage.com/muntri-mews) was recommended to us as a pet-friendly boutique hotel and it most definitely lived up to every expectation... and more! Our room was spacious and clean, plenty comfortable, and the bathroom fixtures and fittings were excellent.

What surprised me the most though was the amazing café and restaurant at the front. We had a small dinner there the first night and so delightful was the presentation that I even murmured a personal 'wow' as the food arrived. And don't let me get started on the beef bacon bagel in the morning with a lovely cup of freshly brewed coffee and the George Town Heritage Hotel-branded cold-pressed fruit juice. The perfect start to the



day! On the second night, we were with friends for dinner but arrived back to a full restaurant and a band playing along. Boutique hotel, maybe, but credit to the management, as it was the staff who were all well-trained, immensely polite, and were as attentive as we could wish for, yet never intrusive. I am sure we will be back, along with our dog, who by the way also enjoyed her first trip to Penang and had a spirited swim in the sea!



Saturday gave us the chance to try the XC90 on the winding, busy roads of Penang. Yes, lots of buses, cars, and lorries, and a surprising number of bicycles, but she handled every road with the style and grace that I had quickly become accustomed to. Smooth all the way and having the extra burst of speed should you need – and the cyclist detection feature worked a treat!

Back to the hotel and a relaxing afternoon. Now, I am sure many of you are aware of the parking, or lack thereof in the centre of Penang. Well, a little secret if you don't know already; there is a well-known hotel not far from Muntri Mews that does an amazing deal of RM4 per day/night. The car is under cover and secure – will leave it your sleuthing skills to find it!

As is always the case, the weekend was over too soon, but I am pleased to say that the Friday traffic was not repeated on the Sunday, and as we made our way back to KL, we were able to relax and enjoy the pleasures of the open road with the Volvo XC90 T8 Twin Engine.

There is so much more to do with the XC90 that I think I could have spent a week or more trying every single gadget and application, but needless to say, I was most impressed with my venture into the world of the T8 Twin Engine. She may be big, but wow, she is a beauty! Don't take my word for it, try it for yourself – call 60 1-800-80-6060, or visit volvocars.com/my to arrange your own test drive.

And not only was it a safe and incredibly comfortable journey to and from Penang; I also calculated my petrol usage and found that it was the least I had ever used on a road trip to the island – always a plus point! ■



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