

Diary from the Desert: 33,000 kilometers in a 911 Dakar

14/01/2025 From negative 20 to positive 38 degrees Celsius, from the coast to an elevation of nearly 4,700 meters, and from highways to gravel roads, Nguyen Hoang Anh, owner of a logistics company, drove his 911 Dakar from Vietnam to the Mongolian part of the Gobi Desert and back again, passing through China along the way. That's 33,000 kilometers in 75 days. Here he talks about his unbelievable journey, which has turned him and his off-road sports car into local celebrities.

The first time you start up a Porsche engine is always a unique experience. Especially if that Porsche is a 911 Dakar. The world begins to vibrate, along with me in the center of it. It's September 2023. I take a deep breath – and then finally exit my garage at home in Ho Chi Minh City, also known as Saigon. I'm seated behind the wheel of the first 911 of its kind sold in Vietnam. It's only been with me for six weeks. But for much longer than that, I've been dreaming of driving an off-road sports car through the closest desert to Vietnam, the Gobi. Although "close" may be the wrong word. The dry zone extends across China and Mongolia. And the journey will cover more than 33,000 kilometers. And I don't have much time either, as winter is fast approaching up there in the north.

Impatience has been my constant companion for some time now, as I've long followed development of the off-road 911. I ordered my car in GT Silver Metallic, one of 2,500 worldwide, a year ago. I didn't modify the vehicle at all before the journey – it's already designed for extreme situations. However, my 54-year-old body is not. In preparation, I did a two-day test-drive through Vietnam, covering 2,000 kilometers. And now I'm embarking on a journey into the unknown in my 911 Dakar. The dream is alive and well and appears to be coming true, which means I've already achieved my first goal.

September 19 - 23, stage destination: border between Laos and China

I'm accompanied by two friends in a pickup and an SUV. We trust each other completely and work well together, which is important because it's a long journey with major challenges. We're using walkie-talkies to communicate and, for longer distances, smartphones. The first few days take us up along the coast of the South China Sea, then to the west through Laos – with breathtaking views. But we're only getting warmed up. My destination is the landscapes that no other 911 has ever navigated. There won't always be roads, and the direct route won't always be the fastest. We haven't defined any specific routes. Just stops for the night, towns we definitely want to visit, and border crossings that require registration. Like the one now between Laos and China.

September 24 - October 3, stage destination: Chaka Salt Lake, Qinghai, China

We enter without any issues and enjoy the Chinese roads just behind the border. This is my first opportunity to really test the potential of the 911 Dakar. And what a powerhouse it is! Kilometer after kilometer, we glide along on our journey up north. Located on the Tibetan Plateau, the crystal-clear Chaka Salt Lake in Qinghai is an absolute highlight. The surface reflects the blue sky, which feels so close here at an elevation of around 3,100 meters.

October 4 - 13, stage destination: Tian Shan, China

We encounter the Gobi Desert's first patches of sand and rolling hills in Xinjiang in northwestern China. It's time to take some serious off-road excursions with the 911 Dakar. The opportunity to navigate this sports car through demanding terrain is a revelation. The 911 is just as good at climbing as it is at sprinting.

Because it simply feels right, we tie a small batch of fireworks to the back of the car with a rope and then drive through the steppe, which is permitted and often done in China. Here it represents a way to expel evil spirits and pave the way for happiness. And that's exactly how it should be! The fireworks are spectacular! Cheers of excitement!

The Chinese leg of the famous Karakoram Highway between Pakistan and China passes between the Khunjerab Pass and Kashgar, once an important city along the Silk Road at the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Because it reaches an elevation of 4,714 meters, it's occasionally referred to as the Eighth Wonder of the World. We almost make it up to 4,700 meters. Our route takes up past the Dushanzi Grand Canyon and on to Kuqa beyond the Tian Shan mountains. The pass is considered to be one of the most beautiful roads in China, and we enjoy the spectacular landscape with its precipitous slopes in dark-grey stone.

The road will soon go into hibernation – so we've made it just in time. There is no path to happiness. Happiness is the path. I didn't come up with that, but it fits perfectly with our journey, which has a single destination: the road we're following. Or even the terrain off the road.

October 14 - 20, stage destination: border between China and Mongolia

We've been on the road for nearly a month now. Behind the wheel, I've been trying to sort the many impressions into thoughts. Is this the adventure of my life? There's plenty of evidence that it is. And there's a lot that's still unclear to me.

We arrive in Hemu high up in the north, for many the most beautiful village in China. What a jewel in an already magnificent region surrounding Kanas Lake. Picturesque autumnal landscapes form an awe-inspiring natural wonder. By the time we arrive, peak season is already over, allowing us to drive the attractive, usually overcrowded forest route to the village. Lush grasslands ahead of us, snow-capped mountaintops off in the distance, and between them the perfectly smooth surface of Kanas Lake. If you were to ask me why I'm on this journey, first of all it's the urge to experience my 911 more intensively. But it's also for moments like these. Magical locations that stay with you for all time.

October 21 - 27, stage destination: Arkhangai Province, Mongolia

The beauty of the past few days has been intoxicating. But these emotions are only intensified when we reach our destination, the Mongolian Gobi Desert, and see the challenges of our trip with our own eyes. I've underestimated the terrain, which has large, sharp stones that sliced two of our tires open. Fortunately, we have two spares with us. Despite all that, we manage to reach our intermediate destination, the home of the Kazakh Beken family, which practices the Mongolian tradition of eagle breeding deep in the mountains. I feel humbled when they show us the majestic animals. What an extraordinary sight. Eagles are revered in Mongolia – for their strength, their agility, and their loyalty. My 911 is my eagle, I think to myself with a slight grin. That evening, we bask in the tranquility of nature with the Bekens, enjoy a meal together, listen to them sing for us, and delve deep into the fascinating world in the westernmost part of Mongolia.

But our difficulties with the desert's harsh terrain continue the next day. While gliding on the desert

sand feels like flying, large stones along sections of the route slow down our progress significantly. With only the tracks of past vehicles to show us the way, some of the terrain is demanding – and quite a daunting task for the 911. But the car pulls through and gets us to where we need to go.

We get lost on our way to the Tsenkher Hot Springs in the Arkhangai Province – and once again the 911 Dakar comes to our rescue. We have to navigate the last 20 kilometers off-road through the mountains. There's no road, and occasionally only a nomadic path to guide us. We cross riverbeds and wind our way through forests. Eventually we reach the healing waters of the hot springs and marvel at the natural wonder. Now I know: The Dakar will be able to handle any terrain on this journey.

October 27 - November 5, stage destination: border between Mongolia and China

The rear bumper hit some rocks when I accelerated too quickly in a riverbed two days ago. Now we have to go to a repair shop in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia. Once we arrive, I'm more than surprised to discover that the mechanic is Vietnamese, apparently like many others here. It's wonderful to be able to talk to people from my home country who don't belong to our travel group, which makes the repair shop a welcome stop for more than just the 911.

The car is ready to go again in no time, and we take this opportunity to flee what is arguably the coldest and most populous capital in the world. After all, we didn't come for a city trip, but rather for experiences like the impressive natural spectacle we encounter a short time later. With the sun setting behind the rolling autumnal woodlands just past the frozen Lake Khövsgöl, the second-largest lake in Mongolia, I try to etch this moment into my memory forever. Snow awaits us further to the east – this much we know.

November 6 - 16, stage destination: Snow Town, Harbin, China

The forecast is correct, and we're greeted by thick snowflakes as we reach the terrain in northern China again. We finally have the opportunity to drift with the 911 – but not for long. The roads are extremely icy, and it's dangerous. When we find ourselves standing in traffic three days later, the situation is no longer dangerous, but risky. The long wait interferes with our plans to such a degree that we decide to take the risk and go off-road, which allows us to pass all of the vehicles stuck on the road. A short time later, the video of this daring maneuver generates more than two million views on social media. This is yet another moment that reveals that my relationship with my 911 has only just begun – and will continue for years to come.

Mohe is the northernmost city in China – and with temperatures below negative 30 degrees Celsius in the winter, it's also the coldest. Here, the only thing between us and Russia is a frozen river. But our route will take us in a southernly direction to China Snow Town. Officially named Zhongguo Xuexiang,

the village certainly lives up to its unofficial name. On what just might be the most beautiful day of our journey, we test the 911 Dakar in China's most famous snow – and what a dream it is! Until today, a 911 had never been seen here in Snow Town. What an honor.

November 17 - December 4, stage destination: Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

The next leg is not as stunning as the first part through western China and, in terms of driving, not as spectacular as in Mongolia. And yet, it's one of the most exciting, as it leaves us with an overwhelming sense of euphoria. We made it! We went to the Gobi Desert and are now on our way home – and want to keep driving. May the road never come to an end. We visit the city of Dandong at the border to North Korea with the collapsed bridge that once connected the country to China. We drive through Beijing and head for Shanhai Pass, where the Great Wall of China begins in the ocean. We continue in a southernly direction and head for home.

While I'm still trying to process the many impressions, I keep noticing people following us with their smartphones. At some point, a friend from China sends me some videos of our journey that his son had found on social media. And suddenly we are even accompanied by a film crew; the hashtags "Vietnam911" and "VietnameseUncle" have been causing quite a sensation on Chinese social media for some time. My Porsche and I – we're famous. We enjoy the attention, the many acquaintances, and inspiring encounters.

It's the first day back in Vietnam, and one thing is clear: It was, indeed, the adventure of my life. A total of 33,000 kilometers in the 911 Dakar – I just might be the first person to complete a mission like that. This calls for a lap of honor. The people who followed our trip online drive alongside us, with more and more gradually getting in on the fun. I come to realize that this journey was not only inspirational for me. Once home, I'm overjoyed and elated by all the impressions and the 911 Dakar, which loves sand dunes just as much as it does frozen mountain lakes, snowy roads, demanding slopes, and empty highways. This vehicle has become incredibly close to my heart over those 75 days, and I want to travel the world with it. And I know it will never fail.

One year later, destination: Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, Germany

Now that it's late summer 2024, I've had time to process the impressions from last winter. I was already working on my next plans when I received a fascinating message: The developers of the 911 Dakar in Stuttgart have heard of me and my journey. They want to meet me. I can hardly believe it – and I'm amazed. My dream not only came true, but also exceeded all expectations.

With an exhausting flight behind me, I find myself a short time later in front of the Porsche Museum in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, where, in a way, my journey began. Achim Lamparter, the General Project

Manager for the 911 Dakar, is there to welcome me. For me, he's a hero because he and his team made my journey possible. He arrives in the 911 Dakar, of course. He spends some time with me, provides insights into the exciting development of the 911, and is interested in learning how "his" 911 performed. I begin singing the car's praises and promise to come for a visit sometime in the 911. After all, this wasn't our last adventure. Someday we'll travel around the whole world, all the way to Stuttgart. Me and my 911 Dakar. My eagle.

Info

Text first published in the Porsche magazine Christophorus 413.

Author: Nguyen Hoang Anh

Photos: Nguyen Hoang Anh and Jörg Eberl

Copyright: All images, videos and audio files published in this article are subject to copyright. Reproduction in whole or in part is not permitted without the written consent of Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche AG. Please contact newsroom@porsche.com for further information.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



Alexander Günzler

Managing Editor Christophorus
+49 (0) 170 / 911 7244
alexander.guenzler@porsche.de



Oliver Hilger

Spokesperson 911 and 718
+49 (0) 170 / 911 3915
oliver.hilger@porsche.de

Image Sublines

Path: Diary from the Desert: 33,000 kilometers in a 911 Dakar/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: Nguyen Hoang Anh, 911 Dakar, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: The journey of his life: Nguyen Hoang Anh drives more than 33,000 kilometers in his 911 Dakar, from Vietnam to the Mongolian part of the Gobi Desert and back again, passing through Laos and China along the way.

Path: Diary from the Desert: 33,000 kilometers in a 911 Dakar/Images/img_4.jpg
Title: Karakoram Highway between Pakistan and China, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Daredevil: Nguyen drives along roads such as the Karakoram Highway and off-road. If you try to plan your exact route, the navigation system responds: "The route cannot be calculated." Of course, that's no problem for the 911 Dakar.

Path: Diary from the Desert: 33,000 kilometers in a 911 Dakar/Images/img_5.jpg
Title: Forrest, Village Hemu, China, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Adventurer: Whether over bridges or through water, over the mountains or along the coast – Nguyen crosses challenging terrain in his 911 Dakar. Spectacular landscapes such as the forests around the village of Hemu are part of everyday life.

Path: Diary from the Desert: 33,000 kilometers in a 911 Dakar/Images/img_7.jpg
Title: Nguyen Hoang Anh, Achim Lamparter, General Project Manager for the Porsche 911 Dakar, Porsche Museum, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: The year after: Nguyen Hoang Anh meets with Achim Lamparter, General Project Manager for the 911 Dakar, at the Porsche Museum – an extraordinary conclusion to quite the adventure.

Link Collection

Link to this article
https://newsroom.porsche.com/en/2025/scene-passion/porsche-911-dakar-vietnam-china-nguyen-hoang-anh-38364.html

Media Package
https://pmdb.porsche.de/newsroomzips/0c6c1c81-766b-433b-8238-cffd7854c961.zip

External Links
https://christophorus.porsche.com/christophorus-site/en.html