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Barbados, Germany, USA and Mexico

We are cycling once more!

It feels great. Our wheels are turning again. On the famous asphalt of the Pacific Highway Number 1. Pelicans are flying by on a perfect blue sky. The sun is shining and we can smell the ocean and a taste of freedom. Friendly passing cyclists are shouting words of encouragement. We left our friend Sherry in Los Angeles some days ago and are on the way to the Baja California – on the way to Mexico. Winter break is over. After we took a break from our Pan Americana tour last year in L.A., we explored the Caribbean island of Barbados by bicycle (thanks to our around the world ticket). Then we returned to Germany to spend an extended holiday at home. Now we are back on the Pan Americana, on the way from Alaska to Argentina.

Historic Highway 101

See and be seen. On the highway of dreams a lot of things compete for attention. On the road posh Cadillacs from the 60s, colorful beetles with surfboards on their top, huge Bentleys, red Ferraris, roaming Lamborghinis and loud Harleys fight to be admired. At the beach beautiful people with shiny white teeth and an Ipod in their ears go jogging. And very unusual – there are a lot of cyclists. California looks like the American Dream come true. Good for us, we do have an appropriate new bicycle. A silver Koga Miyata Twin Traveller. The old tandem is where it was hand built – in the Netherlands. There it will be thoroughly tested and inspected before it will be put in the "Hall of Fame".

The highway winds along the coast and traverses small cities with amazing names like Laguna Beach, Oceanside, or Del Mar. Cafes invite us to stop and the cycling path along the coast is marked very well. The Californian winter welcomes us with up to 80 degrees Fahrenheit and sun – in our heads we can hear the tunes of "California Dreaming" and "Surfing USA" by the Beach Boys, and "Born in the USA" by Bruce Springsteen.



On Barbados: We go for a swim – with our tandem

Thick drops of rain smack on the hot surface, the black clouds have finally reached us. We take refuge in a small rum shop like the ones you can find all over the island. Behind the wooden bar a round black face with white colored teeth laugh at us. "The rain will last a while, make yourselves comfortable. Would you like a blackened Coke (i.e. Coke with rum)?" We look at each other with question marks in the eye, but we have to cycle another 25km back to our hotel and it is only 3 p.m. anyway. "You know guys, it is the end of the rainy season", Rosalina tells us, "only two months ago every day was like this."

We hold on to our Cokes and watch with an alarming feeling that the road transforms itself slowly into a brownish river. The cars pass by slowly, almost like boats. It reminds of us of the flooding you sometimes see on TV. Within an hour the water on the road is 10cm deep and we decide to hit the river before it gets dark. Rosalina laughs out loud as we strip off the jerseys and depart only with cycling shorts and a bra (just Julia, please don't get that wrong!). We create a big fountain at our back and manage to overtake the cars. A tandem in a pool! Sometimes there are bigger stones flowing in our river, but apart from that it is a unique experience. Where else do you have the chance to cycle two hours in a river, if not in the Caribbean after a heavy tropical rain storm? The next day the sun is out again and only a few wet spots under the trees remind us of what was yesterday.

On Barbados we were again the only cyclists. The so-called coastal highway is rather a small country road with two lanes and lots of small traffic jams, where the all-present racing vans honk their horn at us to make us aware of their presence. Often we take even smaller back roads through sugar cane fields and don't meet a soul for hours. For our cyclist's nutrition we can buy flying fish sandwiches and macaroni pie at the small stands near the road. The island is rather flat and small, but in the east there are strenuous hills, 1,200 vertical meters. In humid heat the hills are hard on us - even after one year of training. The rewards: the place where the gods are supposed to live, Bathsheba, a small fishing village and surfer's paradise. A beach surrounded by palm trees only for us. At the far north - roaring seas and blowholes. And a coffee on the empty beach of Speightstown.

Barbados is really "Laid Back". Maybe it is the heat that makes everybody go slower? A lady cashier working in the local supermarket would not keep her job in a German supermarket. And the local fast food chain "Chefette" is not fast at all! Instead there is always time for small talk and a smile. Stefan finds a lot of female fans wanting to sit with him on the tandem, the Rasta guys rather would like to buy the bicycle and get Julia as an add-on. No way, we still have a lot of plans together!





Or maybe it is the rum that causes the relaxed atmosphere; the white or brown alcohol belongs to Barbados as well as sun, beaches, and palm trees. The Mount Gay rum distillery is the oldest distillery worldwide – at least that’s what we were told. We enjoy the fine rum with the beautiful sunsets, the flaming red sun seems to belong to a dream world. Later we listen to the crash of the waves and the sound of the palm trees in the wind. Better than music and the perfect place to be after an eventful year.

On Friday evenings the Oistins Fish Market is the place to be. At the beach the seniors waltz the night away. Hundreds of small wooden huts offer fresh fish, beer, and rum. You can find an occasional tourist here, but in general only locals are here. With fair hair and skin we were easily spotted. The menu is simple: Choose your favorite fish. Salad or macaroni pie? Minutes later the fish is barbecued over an open flame. A heavenly taste, especially if washed down with the local Banks beer. Cheers!



Germany

It was really great to see family and friends after one year on the road. There was a lot to be told and to be listened to. Marriages, child birth, career jumps, new housings, new cars – we have missed quite a bit. The break of seven weeks in Germany was a long one, but too short for many, because we just said hello and had to say good-bye in the next sentence. But we will come back!



Even back home we have been on the road a lot. For example, we went to a travel fair in Stuttgart for our sponsor, Koga Miyata and to an outdoor fair in Munich for our sponsor, Cascade Designs. It was nice to share experiences with other travelers and interested folks. The same is true for the media. We have been on German television again and two times on the radio as well. Exciting! On top of that we have written an article for the “Radwelt”, one of the biggest cycling magazines in Germany about the first year of our trip. Although it is all in German you might want to check it out: www.bankerbiker.de/media_e.html

Nevertheless, the happiness we feel on the tandem and our deep belief that we should live our dream no matter what was constantly challenged back home: What are you going to do after the journey? Don’t you fear armed robberies in South America? Theft? What about a crash on the tandem in the middle of nowhere? Disease? Scorpions and snakes? The answer brings to mind our quote of the month by Erich Kästner, which you will find at the end of the text. You see: It was getting time for us to leave and continue to live our dream. Continue to live like we think we should, although it was of course awesome to meet family and friends.

Outlook

What will the Bankerbikers do in 2008? The next three months we will explore Mexico. We will spend the first two months on the Baja California and then continue to see the old colonial towns in Mexico’s heartland. In May, the rainy season will start, so it will be time for us to leave. Currently we plan to fly to Quito in Ecuador, but after looking at the recent destruction in the country we are not so sure. Then we will travel through the magnificent Andes in Peru, where friends from Canada and Germany will visit us. In October we will traverse Bolivia and enter Chile. After that we will cycle straight South to reach the end of the world, Tierra del Fuego in Argentina and end the Pan Americana. About 14,000 km are ahead of us – we are excited!

Hasta Luego,
Julia and Stefan

“Is it going to be better or worse
People ask year for year.
Let’s be honest: Life is always
Life threatening.”
(Erich Kaestner)

Sponsor of the month:

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