



I WANT TO RIDE MY BICYCLE

EMBARKING ON A JOURNEY AROUND THE WORLD – YOU THINK THIS DOESN'T SOUND LIKE A BIG CHALLENGE ANYMORE IN OUR TIMES OF AFFORDABLE ROUND-THE-WORLD FLIGHT TICKETS? WELL, IF YOU TRADE A SEAT IN BUSINESS CLASS FOR THE SADDLE OF YOUR BICYCLE THAT'S AN ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT STORY. AND STEFAN BRANDL HAS DONE JUST THAT.

In April 2009, Stefan Brandl started his trip from the Styrian capital of Graz. Since then, he has already covered more than 1,000km by bike and uses his current stopover in Greece to reflect on the first leg of his journey. "I have already experienced more than I would ever have thought possible," says the 31-year-old. "My trip through the Balkans alone has given me enough stories to tell for the next couple of years when I'm back at home!"

For the past five years, this place called 'home' has been the idyllic Austrian village of Fuschl am See near Salzburg, where the native Styrian didn't work in a bike repair shop but a buzzing advertising agency. The idea for his bike trip around the world had been on his mind for quite some time. "I've always wanted to go on a trip like this. My travels to Africa and other countries made me want to leave everything behind and simply face the challenge of taking every day as it comes. And that's exactly what I'm doing right now!"

However, before the start of his journey, there was a heap of organizational work to be done: finding the right equipment, planning the route, getting the right visas, selling his car to Africa – but after a few test runs the journey finally started on April 8, 2009.

Soon after his departure, Brandl and his heavily loaded bike turned heads on cycle tracks from Styria to Slovenia. "When I was asked where I was headed to I simply told people I was going to Bad Radkersburg – if I had told them the truth, they would probably have thought I was crazy!" laughs Brandl. The first days of riding in sun, rain and storm already brought along some unforgettable experiences. "The only thing I had to get used to was the wild camping. Don't get me wrong, the nature was breathtaking, but only having a stork to talk to was a bit hard for me!"

No matter if it was during his stopover in Belgrade, during concerts in Nis, encounters with the Serbian highway police or Orthodox Easter celebrations in the Macedonian capital of Skopje – Brandl was always greeted with overwhelming hospitality and a couple of drinks. "I absolutely loved the warmth and friendliness of the people on the Balkans," he relates. "In Veles I was even asked to do an interview for a Macedonian radio station – that's how quickly you can become famous!"

Apart from his contributions to Macedonian radio culture, Brandl also wants to do good in other ways. With his charity project 'Bike2HelpThere', he seeks to support the people he meets on his trip and at the same time show donors what their money is actually used for. "With this project I want to help people who really deserve it and bring back some hope into their lives. I promise to use every donated cent in a responsible and charitable way!"

If you want to know more about Bike2HelpThere and the next part of Stefan Brandl's journey taking him from Greece to Istanbul, visit www.thetramp.at