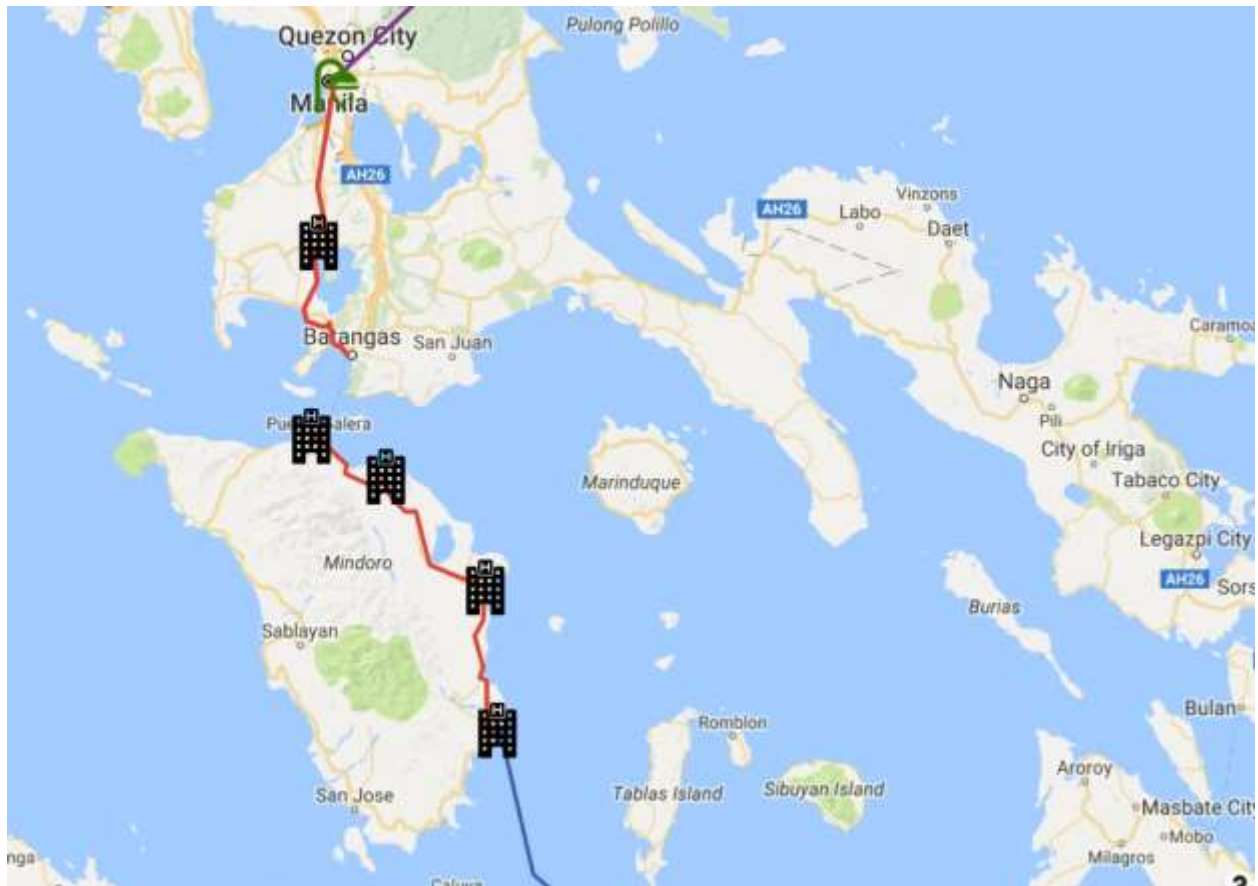


Season 6 – Part 1. The Philippines...



Mo 1.2.2016, day 204?. Still on the plane...

I'm not really sure if this really is the 204th day of our trip, Sunday only turned into Monday because we crossed the date line. So I guess we paid for all the hours that we won when crossing time zones by losing a whole day.

Finally, after about 14 hours of flight, 3 meals, 3 movies and a couple of hours of sleep we touched down in Manila. We got through immigration in a flash, withdrew cash at an ATM without problems, we weren't hassled after exiting the customs. It was a far more relaxing and quiet arrival than I had expected. Taxis are government controlled, and we decided to bite the bullet and go for the safer and less adventurous option of simply paying the 50\$ for the 1h taxi ride to the Warm Shower we had organized south of the airport.

We were almost stifled by the humid heat when we first got out of the air-conditioned terminal. The next shock was the traffic. There were far more cars and far fewer scooters than I had expected. This led to the roads being absolutely blocked. Apparently Manila has the worst traffic problem in the world. I was really wondering what biking would be like!

We got to the house of Dale and Liz at about 7pm. It was a huge place in a gated community. Liz was home and so was Richard, a Welsh guy who was also living in the house. Liz made us a great salad with chicken. We were both absolutely destroyed but we made a fighting effort to stay awake until Dale arrived at about 10 pm to say hello. We chatted for a bit, then finally got to our room and collapsed. Liz and Dale are absolutely wonderful people. This is going to be one more fantastic Warm Shower experience!





Tu 2.2.2016, day 205. Putting the bikes together and dinner in the Apezeller Stübli!

We slept like logs until about 8am and got up in time to see Dale. He made a great coffee and we had a bit of a chat. The next big project was putting the bikes back together. I had bought a USB charger in the US that is mounted on the head set. The cable has to be threaded through the fork. This took me about 2 hours and drove me half-crazy, trying to fiddle the wire through the star nuts with sweat dripping off my nose. I finally managed to assemble everything and after lunch the bikes were fully put back together. We had a small ride around the neighbourhood and in the evening Dale and Liz took us out to a place run by a Swiss guy serving Swiss specialities. I had Röschi and Siria had a Rahmschnitzel with noodles. It was fascinating listening to Dale and Liz's stories. They really are great people, now working in top management for a large 100-million-dollar fashion company. They told us all the stories about their time living in Sri Lanka, about working for charity for the Red Cross, about organizing Christmas parties in an orphanage, about meeting celebrities in the fashion industry and about their bicycle trip around Taiwan. Taiwan sounds like a fantastic place for biking. We have a lot to look forward to!

We 3.2.2016, day 206. Off we go...

Dale and Liz got up quite early, so we did as well, so we could say good-bye. Then we packed up and headed off. Biking in the Philippines is definitely much more fun than in the USA. There is so much going on and so much to see. The Jeepneys these colourfully decorated, wonderfully pimped with chromium flashing all over jeep-like public busses are absolutely fascinating as is the mayhem of all the

other cars, trucks, scooters, sidecar taxi-scooters, etc... In spite of the mess on the roads biking is rather easy-going as everyone seems to be used to expect the unexpected and everyone just goes with the flow. We stopped for lunch at a place that seemed to be a garden and ordered food without knowing what we were getting. We ordered maniok, thinking it was going to be manioc, but it turns out that it is chicken. We also didn't know how big the servings were going to be. Turns out each dish was for 4 people and we got 3 dishes, so enough for 12 people. Of course we had no chance of finishing everything, but we did manage to finish 2 dishes. We certainly have good appetites! After lunch we were feeling really lazy with stomachs full to bursting point. The heat was stifling and the road started to climb. We really had a tough time, and finally arrived wet and sticky in Tagaytay. This town is built on the rim of a volcanic crater and soon after we arrived we got a view down into the crater. The best view was from the top floor veranda of a Starbucks, yes, even here they are everywhere! The view was absolutely stunning!

We went to check out Mountain Breeze Hostel and they still had 2 beds in a dorm for 16\$. It was a really nice place filled with the typical western hostel crowd plus some Filipinos and Indians. I got chatting to a Scottish and Czech couple who were teaching English in China. Apparently there are plenty of jobs there, no qualifications or work visa needed. Good to know!







Th 4.2.2016, day 207. Monster bike ride through the back country.

We were planning on riding as far as Batangas where we were hoping to get a Warm Shower. It was about a 70 km ride according to Google and my feeling was it was going to be predominantly downhill. I woke up very early and went for a walk to see the sun rising over the crater lake. We had a good breakfast of fruit, yoghurt and oatmeal and headed off down the steep winding road into the crater through the jungle. While having a break and enjoying the view we heard incredibly loud music coming out of the forest. The music got even louder and seemed to be coming towards us. It was coming from a truck with gigantic speakers mounted to the roof. Soon afterwards a second music truck passed us. I really have no idea what the purpose of these trucks was. Mobile discos?

The ride along the lake was absolutely stunning. We were definitively getting into more rural areas. Everyone we passed looked at us as if we were aliens from Mars. Everyone laughed, waved, shouted something at us or simply stared. The ride turned out to be far tougher than anticipated. The road was really small and at times climbed and descended with crazy grades. While climbing the sweat was simply running down me and dripping off my nose. One descent was almost too much for my brakes and they all but stopped working and the discs turned a funny dark colour.

Close to the village of Laurel on the shore of Lake Taal a Google car crossed us. I'll have to remember to check out StreetView to see if we are on the photo. Would be quite funny!

Lunch was also quite an experience. We stopped at a bamboo hut in the middle of nowhere. It was a restaurant run by Mum, Dad, their two daughters and their son. We were the only guests and a real big thing for them. They wheeled Dad in his wheelchair close to us, put on some music that cut out again and again due to the fluky power. They seemed to have only one dish which was a beef soup apparently coming from a cow they recently slaughtered. In the end we all posed for photos.

The ride turned out to be more like 100 km, also due to the fact that one road was closed forcing us to retrace our steps and find a detour. Getting into Batangas the traffic was horrendous. However, we are starting to get good at the local custom of weaving our way past all the cars and trucks using every gap. In the city we found internet and found there was no message from our Warm Shower host, so we decided to take the ferry over to Puerto Galera and White Beach. After asking dozens of people we finally found the right terminal to get tickets for the ferry. On the ferry we got talking to an Australian guy who -for me- epitomized the ugly, nasty, racist, fat bellied, looser, who didn't make it in his own country and then emigrated to the developing world and expects to be treated like a king. Disgusting. Unfortunately, I was too polite to say anything.

It was pitch black when we arrived in Puerto Galero. We had about a 5 km ride up a hill and down the other side to get to White Beach. The power seemed to be down as the few houses we passed were only lit up with candles. It was really very dark. As we biked through the jungle, e very now and then we heard rustling in the trees above us and strange howls and screeches.

On the ride over we had booked a room in a hotel over Agoda for 20\$. It turned out to be fine. We put our bikes and all our stuff into the room and went for a walk along the beach. As expected, White Beach turned out to be a touristy place with scruffy concrete resort like hotels, touts all over the place trying to sell rooms or sunglasses or all sorts of other stuff. There were speakers blaring loud music out onto the beach and girls or ladyboys show-dancing. We found a quiet corner at the end of the beach for dinner.

We then headed straight to bed. It had been a huge day with quite tough riding. I woke up several times during the night with cramps. I'll have to figure out how to get enough liquid and salts into my body, if we are going to be riding in this heat!



Fr 5.2.2016, day 208. A day in White Beach doing nothing.

We spent all day on White Beach, had some mango shakes, eat at regular intervals, went for a little walk here and there, went for a little swim. I finally came to the conclusion that White Beach isn't all that bad really. It's relatively low key, the beach and the water are wonderful as is the lush green hilly backdrop. Most of the tourists seemed to be Filipinos or Chinese. There were only few western men with Filipina wife / girlfriend. For me it is really is crazy, that this is the concept of "vacation", that we developed in the west is now being copied all over the world and polluting and ruining the few unspoilt spots that remain.





Sa 6.2.2016, day 209. A hilly and very wet ride to Calapan.

We got up at 6 am, before the restaurants opened and had breakfast of crackers, bananas and peanut butter. We were expecting a very tough day as the road was very windy indicating that there probably would be hills. Our intention was to get the climbing done in the cool morning hours. It was overcast as we headed out. It soon started to rain. It continued to rain all day, and it was serious rain. However the temperature was a pleasant 25°C and for bicycling the rain was actually better than the sun we had had the day before. We stopped at a lovely place on the hilltop for coffee. It became apparent that food and also water would definitely not be problem here as almost every house or hut has some sort of a little shop selling all sorts of things. Very often they also have some cooked meal or other available.

We met a very nice girl who ran a little store in a little village and got chatting and ended up sharing FB contacts and posing for some selfies. She explained to us some of the local dishes we should try, such as Bibingka, Putobongbong and Mami.

In Calapan we found a nice little motel like hotel with rooms for about 9\$. There was a Swiss couple in the room next to us, who were bumming round the Philippines in Jeepneys. After checking in we had a stroll round town and Siria found a great market where we sat down to test the local flavours. We are certainly breaking the “boil it, peel it or leave it” rule, but so far we have had not a touch of stomach problems.











Su 7.2.2016, day 210. Another wet day to Typhoon stricken Pinamalayan.

Again we got up pretty early and had crackers bananas and peanut butter for breakfast. This is really quite rich in energy, but I am not so sure how healthy it really is. But somehow you just have to eat what is available. The region we were riding through seemed quite a bit poorer than the previous days, the huts were even more primitive and the locals often gaunt and with very bad teeth. Also I had the feeling that their laughing was not friendly, also everyone shouted "Hey Joe!" at us, and again I had the feeling it was more derogatory than friendly.

In one village almost every store had signs for Bibingka up, so we stopped to see what exactly Bibingka is and bought two from the girl running the place, who must have been all of about 12. Bibingka turned out to be absolutely delicious. It is made of coconut, rice and cheese and is baked in a pot over a coal fire on a banana leaf. We washed it down with extremely sweet ginger tea.

On the side of the road there was work ongoing fixing the power cables that had come down during the Typhoon of December. When we got to Pinamalayan the destruction was evident everywhere with rooves missing, buildings collapsed, trees uprooted. The roof of the gas station was still lying collapsed on top of a car. We rode down to the beach and there was a hotel there "Blue Waves Resort" that had most definitely seen better days. I went in to enquire and a young girl, who spoke no English whatsoever, informed be it the room was 300 PhP (about 6 \$). We decided to stay, in spite of the dirt, mould and hastily patched up ceiling of our room. The door of our room couldn't be closed, let alone be locked, but still I didn't feel too concerned about our stuff. We headed into town and had dinner in a restaurant. Somehow it was depressing to see the town in such shambles.

We went back to the hotel, Siria had a bit of a snooze and I sat out on the balcony to play the guitar and to look out over the street to the beach and sea beyond. There was a group of men sitting at a table on the beach drinking beer. It seems Sunday is the day to drink. Soon a 3-wheeled scooter turned up who had the loud speakers. It was the end of my guitar playing, but still it was fun to listen to the music and see the locals having a good time.





Mo 8.2.2016, day 211. Ride to Roxas and the ferry.

Again we were on the road quite early, but soon stopped for some Bibingka. The ride was very easy as it was absolutely flat and we had a strong tail wind. The area here was more agricultural with bright green rice paddies, mango and banana plantations. There were water buffaloes everywhere on the fields together with some white birds that were sometimes perched on the buffaloes. One field was being worked by a farmer using the buffaloes. It was like a scene from the last century.

There were lots of fruit stands by the side of the road. We stopped to buy a pomelo and also a sort of a spiny fruit that we had no idea what it actually was.

We got to Roxas around lunchtime, had rice soup and noodle soup for lunch, bought bananas and some sweet breads for the ferry ride and headed down to the port. There Siria hunted round to gather information while I settled down for a second lunch of rice and beans. It turned out the ferry at 4pm was cancelled due to rough seas, so we decided to spend the night in Roxas and take the ferry next morning. Siria found a great little hotel where we settled down and relaxed while watching the rain and the wind outside. Right next to the hotel there was a Karaoke bar & grill and there was quite obviously a party going on. Just after sunset we headed over to explore. There were only 5 people there, all of whom seemed to be working at the place, singing Karaoke and having dinner. It turned out that there was only beer to drink and no food. I decided to give the Karaoke a go, but the machine broke down just as I was entering the song number. I was really sorry to have sabotaged the party, but it was just bad luck that the machine broke down just then. After about 1h of rebooting the system, reading manuals and telephone calls, the Karaoke technician turned up, opened the thing up, did something and it was working again. So I finally got to sing "Love Hurts", didn't go too badly actually. But there were so many effects mixed in with the singing, that I probably could have randomly wailed whatever I liked and it would have sounded good.

We then went back down to the pier to find some dinner and had some fun with a couple of young guys who were running a little food stall.





Tu 9.2.2016. Day 212. Ferry ride to Caticlan.

We were planning to get the ferry at 8am, so we got up at 6:30 and I headed down to the harbour to see about tickets. The counter was still closed so I went for coffee at the joint we were the night before. I was surprised to see that the same young guys were still there working. Apparently they work 24h shifts, taking turns to sleep on a mat on the floor of the booth. I asked if they had Bibingka or Putobongbong and they said that the vendor who usually sells them was not there due to the rain.

The 8am ferry was also cancelled, the next one running at 10am, so I got tickets for that one. Just then Siria joined me and we went back to "our" joint to see about breakfast. It turned out that the young guy running the place walked all the way to town to get some Putobongbong for me! So finally we also got to try this. It is rather similar to Bibingka, only that it is boiled and not cooked in oil over a fire.

We went to the ferry terminal in good time. The ferry finally left with 1 h delay. I spent most of the 4h ride outside watching the waves and the occasional flying fish scuttling over the water away from the boat. We soon got a first glimpse of Boracay Island with its ugly cement hotel bunkers. Out at sea there were scores of parasailers. Boracay will be hellishly touristic! After anchoring out at sea for another hour or so the ferry finally docked in Caticlan. We quickly biked to the small hotel we had booked out on the coast east of town. It was great and right on the beach. I immediately unpacked my kite stuff and just managed to get in about 30 minutes of kiting before it got too dark.

In the evening there was quite a party going on with the German, Polish and Russian kite surfers who were also staying in the hotel. Rum flowed freely, the music was loud and the dancing pretty wild. We

stayed up a bit, but soon put one of our great talents to good use: sleeping peacefully, no matter how much noise there is.





