

Under The Spotlight

Next stop; China

Cycling around the world for charity

By Shana Kongmun

Chiang Mai seems to be at the crossroads for many long distance travelers, I've met cyclists, pilots and big bikers all undertaking marathon travels and all stopping in Chiang Mai on their way to more distant climes.

Recently, accomplished cyclist Peter Smolka started from his front door in Erlangen in Germany in March 2013 and plans to circumnavigate the globe for the second time in his life. He cycled around the globe from 2000 to 2004 traveling 71,000 km, he expects to complete this trip mid-2017.

Peter is raising funds for Médecins Sans Frontières, or Doctors without Borders, the international group of medical professionals that travel around the world to provide health care and medical training. "I have met them in previous travels, they go to really dangerous areas and are always the last to leave." For 20 cents Euro, friends, family and supporters sponsor every kilometer he rides. So far he has raised €7,000 and has done 22,000 kilometers. He noted that he has had a total of 35,000 km covered by sponsors already, and laughed that he



Peter Smolka crossing the border into Kyrzygstan.

may need to keep cycling to cover the funds that were promised. "I may never stop cycling at this rate!"

Peter is not a professional cyclist, in fact he's an IT guy but spent a lot of time on cycling tours and his previous trips inspired him to do it one more time, this time to raise funds for charity. Peter said he started out after he gave up his job, packed up his stuff and put it in storage, and then launched the trip from his front door in Germany and cycled through to the Czech Republic, Poland and on to a city outside Moscow that is a sister city to his own town of Erlangen where he handed a letter from his Mayor to the Mayor of the Russian town. He has more letters for more

sister cities including ones in the United States, Nicaragua, Turkey, and even a sister city only a few kilometers away in the former East Germany.

India was tough, he said, my yellow jersey would be black in two days due to the diesel fumes. He said, Chiang Mai is heaven compared India, even though we were suffering from smog at the time he noted his jersey stayed yellow here. He added Thailand has areas on the sides of the road and while the traffic is much faster here than in India, it is still easier to cycle. His next stop is Nanjing and then Beijing, via Laos and Vietnam. He hopes to keep himself "grounded" the entire time, either on his bicycle or

on a boat. He hopes that he won't have to resort to flying, looking for a cargo ship perhaps from South Korea to anywhere in North America. From there he will cycle through to South America where he hopes to catch a cargo ship to Africa and then from Africa up through the Middle East to Turkey and then slow through Europe and finally home.

One of the key factors for concern is weather, he said that his schedule has to revolve around the weather and the seasons. He noted that border issues were also a concern, it is not possible to cycle over the Myanmar border from India so he joined a caravan of buses and motorhomes of people he had met in Kyrgyzstan. He noted that the hardest part was not the weather and cycling over the mountain passes but the steppes. He added that it was the long endless cycle across the steppes of Kazakhstan. He said that it takes a lot of mental discipline to not picture the next day or the next but to focus on the now.

Peter has a blog and although it is in German Google translate does pretty well with German. <http://www.tour-de-friends.de/>