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BIKE LIFE

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‘To put things in a nutshell:
we started taking life seriously.
You only live once, so it is so important
to take control of your decisions.
Their outcome will either be an empire
or a bucketful of unrealized dreams.’

PROLOGUE

THE EMPTY PAGE

Sometimes we crave a little getaway. All of us have duties, responsibilities, a busy job, a child or three dogs to look after. And all of us simultaneously try to do in life what we like doing. Nowadays life is turbulent and full of distractions: your phone rings and your partner wants to be picked up. Those bills still have to be paid. Your fridge needs filling up, and your boss wants you to work overtime tonight. There's a climate crisis outside and Instagram is recommending who you should follow next. Where does it end?

Well, what if we tell you there is a remedy for the mess above. A temporary one perhaps, but a clean slate and fresh start nonetheless. A way of being alone in the mountains, knowing you have the place all to yourself – being able to contemplate the Milky Way, drinking from a stream so clean, gifted with smiles from passing strangers or experiencing kindness in abundance. A way to get to know yourself and our planet better. To clear our minds of clutter, and encourage us to live simply, in respect of the environment and those who live in it. Something we like to call the empty page, where we take charge of our own lives and start writing a new beginning – or perhaps a side chapter

or tangent to an existing story –, nonetheless trying to learn something new and challenging the unknown and seductive path of deepest desires.

It's not always a comfortable remedy and it needs a certain kind of... courage, but anyone can do it: we have seen families with babies, dogs or even cats, but also retired couples, solo women and men with busy jobs or recovering from an injury, and even people fresh out of school, doing what we think is the very best way to discover the world around you.

In this book we will be exploring what it means to travel by bicycle. The pros and cons, the healing, life-changing effect it can have on you and how it will contribute to your social sense of being, your visual and mental understanding of the world we live in. On your bike you adopt a different approach to prioritizing what really matters in your life, learning what cannot be taught in any book. We will try our very best to show and tell you all that we love about it.

Welcome to the Bike Life.



OUR STORY

TRISTAN: THE SOLO TOUR

My name is Tristan. At the start of 2014 I had not only been out of high school for two years, holding on to a job I felt stuck and unhappy in. I had also endured a very difficult relationship that put me in a very dark place. To stop this developing further I started running long distances to keep my wondering mind busy. One day, I saw a video of a few guys traversing three thousand kilometers through northern India in rickshaws and got fascinated by these brave young boys doing something I had never considered possible.

The seed was sown. Shortly after, I planned a run from New York to Los Angeles. A rather Forrest Gump-like story, you might think. Well, fortunately I was reminded by my brother – who was to come with me on a bicycle to carry our stuff – that there was a more efficient and less time-consuming way to cross from coast to coast. ‘Why don’t we both do it by bicycle?’ he said. ‘We’re Dutch. We’ve grown up on bicycles and cycling through America shouldn’t be that hard’.

Four months later I, unfortunately alone, as my brother was involved in an accident early on in the journey and had to go back home, had traversed the five thousand heat-swept kilometers it took to get from east to west on a \$200 bicycle

that I’d bought online, with a heavy backpack on my sweating spine and a motivation that was stronger than anything I’d done before – I still don’t know how I even managed it.

Then something started to itch. ‘What if I can do this again?’ But better; with a good second-hand bicycle, some proper waterproof panniers and perhaps a camera to document the journey. Yes, since I hadn’t committed my life to any other responsibilities, I was actually able to plan this. And with the support of my family, I managed to once again prepare myself for a journey that scared the living daylight out of me. But I had to do it. Because there was nothing better. And frankly, I loved it.

Shortly before setting off on what would become a two-year cycling tour from my hometown Bergen to the Norwegian city sharing the same name (through pretty much all of the western part of Europe) I met a girl in Amsterdam who I, not regrettably, fell in love with but left behind to cycle. Little did I know that this girl was going to play a huge role in my life, not to mention us writing a book together about our story. That story starts now.



BELÉN: THE ARCHITECT

Spanish-born and raised, my name is Belén. When I was younger, my parents would take me and my brother off to the mountains on our holidays, and I remember I loved spending time outdoors. But as a person, I have always been very correct and hardworking, which meant that, on turning eighteen, I didn't think of any other option but to go to university and study for a career that would mesh both my technical and artistic interests. This was architecture.

I knew I wanted to travel and do 'other stuff' – whatever that meant – but my perfectionism and, back then, inability to think outside the box I'd grown up in told me I first had to finish my studies and secure a future that was safe and reliable. That's what everyone does, right? I skipped Erasmus to finish the six-year degree as fast as possible to then get some experience in the field and earning my first salaries. I applied for jobs all around the world and, just as I was preparing for an interview in Shanghai, I received an offer to work in Amsterdam. This is where Tristan and I met.

A few months later I got offered another job in London from an office I had previously applied to. Hungry as I was for change and discovery, I decided to move there after six months of living in the Netherlands. London was a great experience and shaped me professionally, but as I got more comfortable with the lifestyle, my dream of traveling started knocking on the door again, becoming stronger every day. I hadn't given in to it before, because it had never felt like

the right moment: not enough money, risk of losing my spot at university, uncertainty of finding a job... but these concerns faded as my relationship with Tristan grew stronger. He seduced me into giving traveling by bicycle a go, and I trusted him.

After nearly two years of office work, I decided now was the right moment to take on this life-changing experience. Having taken the decision mentally, I then spent one more year slowly preparing myself for the transition. Even though I had a great job that gave me the chance to work on amazing architectural projects around the world, my days started feeling longer and longer. I'd look out of the window by my desk trying to understand why I was sitting there for more than eight hours a day facing a computer, while the sun cast warmth on the world outside and all those many places waiting to be explored.

I had also never really cycled before, at least not seriously. Amsterdam had taught me the necessary skills to stay balanced on a bicycle, plus a fair bit of traffic tactics. London honed that skill, as I always cycled to and from work through the busy streets. I was ready for the challenge. I had the savings, a good CV for future use, no serious attachments and all the drive to try something very different.

It was decided – we were going to discover the world on a bicycle.



READY TO JOIN

So after Tristan finished his tour, he left Norway and took his bicycle, panniers and himself on a bus through the Channel Tunnel and got ready to cycle the United Kingdom. The first four weeks were spent in London to finally enjoy a longer period of being together, and Belén slowly started settling into the mindset of quitting her job in the near future, sewing up some medical concerns (she has type-1 diabetes and asthma) and betting on an unpredictable, adventurous and completely new lifestyle. Of course, with baby steps.

Tristan spent the next six months cycling England, Wales, Scotland and the island of Ireland, as well as doing a winter trip from Stuttgart to Milan, and back over the Alps to the Netherlands. A steady bus connection through 'the Chunnel' allowed us to see each other frequently and get ready for our new life together. On the days that she might've questioned her choice, we'd speak on the phone, talking about what really mattered to us. High on that list were freedom of choice, following certain dreams like discovering other parts of the world, and getting older happily. Call them stereotypical, but only a fraction of us actually live these values through the invisible veil of responsibilities we waltz into. For some, that veil turns out to be as sticky as a spiderweb, not letting go of those who fall victim to it, to the point where your dedication has to be razor sharp if you want to even stand the chance of cutting yourself loose. But as we saw that perfect opportunity coming closer and closer, we were able to develop our exit strategy, tracing out the path we desired to ride.

This might all sound a little deep, but to put it in a nutshell: we started taking life seriously. You only live once, so it is so important to take control of your decisions. Their outcome will either be an empire or a bucketful of unrealized dreams.

Then the day came. Belén quit her job. Surprisingly, she was offered a sabbatical, and she made sure to keep this option open in case we or bike life wouldn't gel. Smart girl. A few weeks later her rental agreement got passed on to the next person seeking their fortune in London's concrete jungle, her bags were packed and we closed a chapter, together. The Chunnel bus opened its welcoming doors and, as the luggage slid inside and we sat down on the soft textile of our seats, we looked at each other and smiled. This was it. We were going to do this.

EXPLORING HOME A EUROPEAN ODYSSEY

If you ask Europeans about their favorite places to travel, most of the times they'll tell you the grass is greener on the other side; visiting New York, all of Japan or other exotic faraway places. And in some ways, it can be true that your hometown and the country or continent it resides in feels boring, lacking in exciting sensations or otherwise. So, let's reconsider our closest neighbors, because if there's something that really makes Europe shine, it's the diversity of landscapes, languages, food and even climates.

Europe provides an exceptional playground to cycle through, because of the great bike infrastructure that has been developed and connected over the course of many years. Some of the longest and worldly known biking routes belong to the European EuroVelo network, such as the Danube route (E6) or the one along the Atlantic coast (E1) connecting the North Cape in Norway with Southern Spain. Close to 45,000 km (with another 45,000 km planned) of routes take cyclists through forty-two countries. A plentitude of choice! Most of these routes are comfortable, with little roughness involved. When taking tangents right and left, they'll give you all the gravel and challenges you may be looking for.

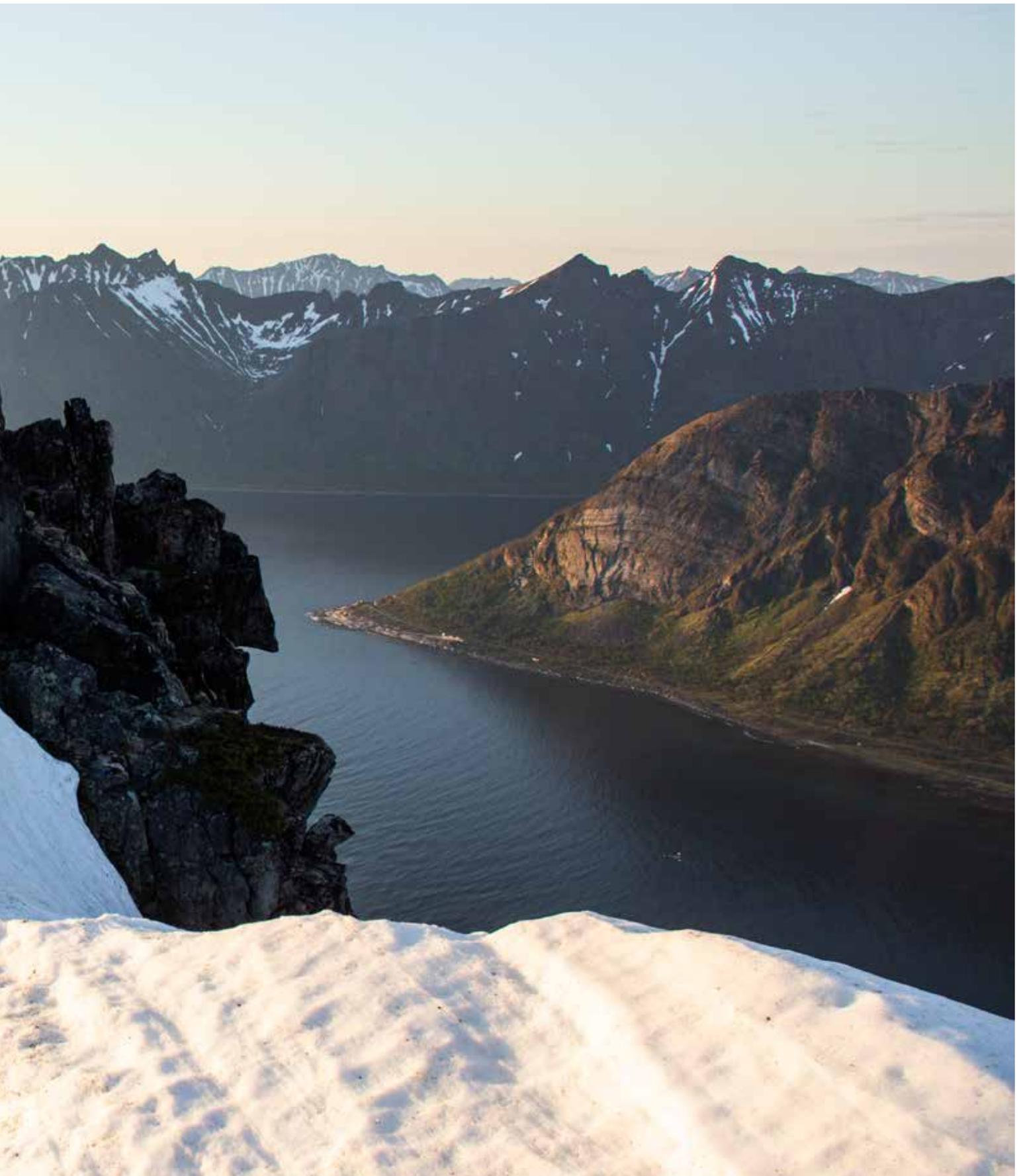
Moving around Europe with a packed bicycle is still a challenge in most countries, but generally it is possible and relatively easy to transport your gear in a bus or train. Programs like 'Interrail' make things easier for land travelers as you can purchase a single train ticket allowing you to take trains through all European countries, saving you from annoying complications. It only takes a day to travel, for example, from the Netherlands to France or Italy. We do wish Interrail would sell separate bicycle tickets as that would make taking your unpacked bicycle along with you much easier!

It took a while to convince Belén to embark on our first bike tour together in Europe – she was all for some radical, otherworldly adventure. Our first destination had to be a place where June wouldn't be too hot or cold, cyclists were a commodity, camping out and sleeping in a tent were allowed and most importantly: a country with dazzling natural beauty so we could continue building our jobs as photographers. And there is only one European country that truly meets that criterion.

NORWAY

FJORDS AND A SUN THAT NEVER SETS







‘A bad day on a touring bike
always beats a good day in the office.’

inspired by Mike Brcic

Why Norway? you may think. With Tristan coming out of a solo tour lasting roughly two years, we decided that the best way for us to come to terms with a touring lifestyle was to choose a country that would not only make sense seasonally (as we were starting in June), but also felt wild yet safe, and offered an abundance of opportunities to stop for the night and camp out. For a moment we thought of going all in and flying somewhere very far away, unknown and with a shockingly different culture. But for someone like Belén who had never camped out or ridden a bicycle further than a few kilometers, it made sense to stay closer to home in case things didn't work out – especially when you can find this kind of adventure on the continent that you call home. And Norway offered everything.

We chose to cycle the near entirety of the Norwegian coast over a period of four months, camping out practically every night and with plenty of time ahead allowing for flexibility.

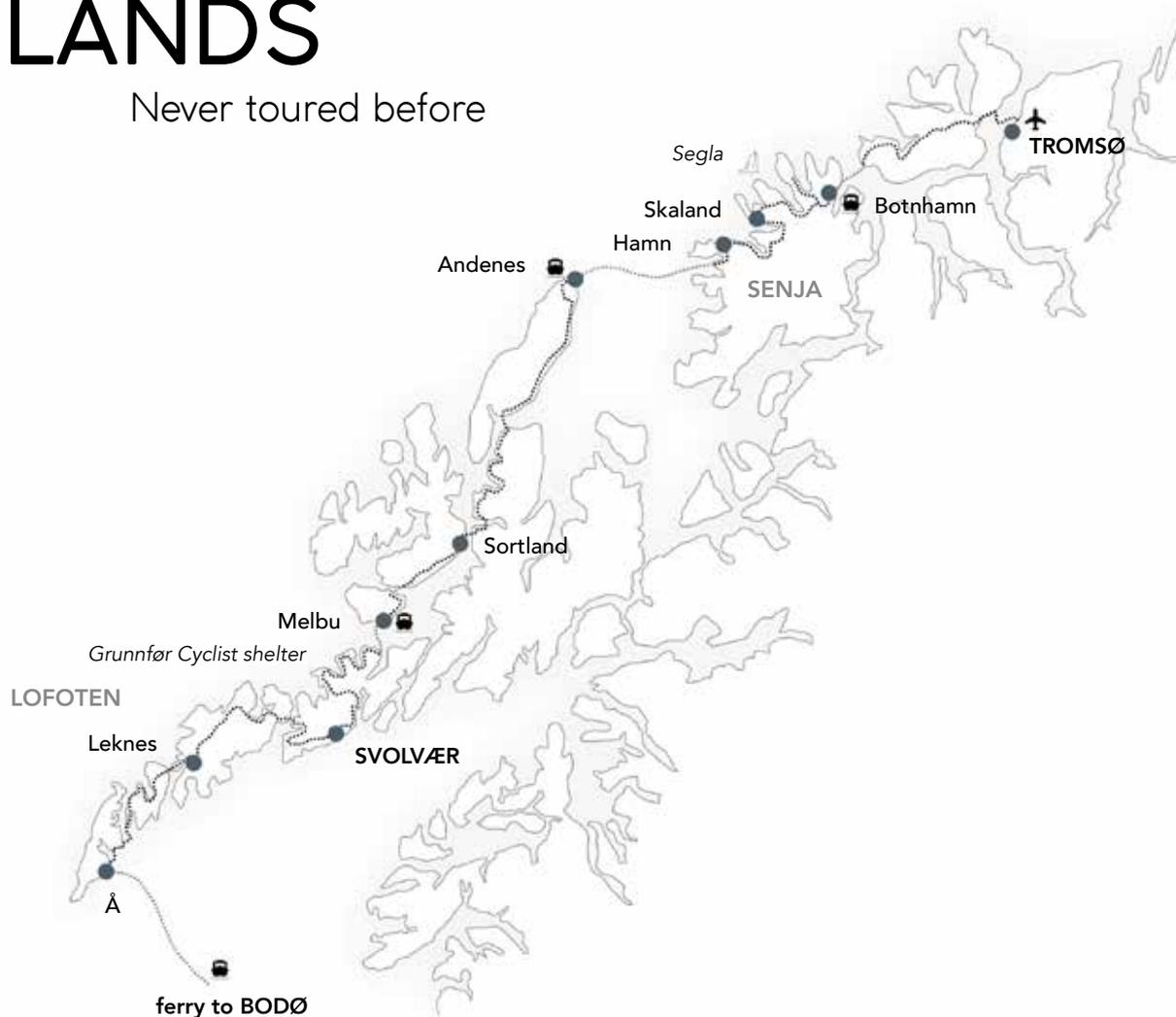
How was this possible? Well, as it turns out, each Scandinavian country allows visitors to travel through and, with due respect to nature and the locals, to camp out freely (as long as you're about 150 meters away from the next house). This right is what allowed us to start out on our tour together without having to spend too much, and what made it possible for Belén to pedal along and decide to stop for the night whenever she got tired.

There is also an added bonus; cycling through Norway is like cycling through a postcard of unbelievable sceneries. One minute you are cycling over snowy mountain passes, the next minute you are down by a Caribbean-looking lagoon of sunny blue hues. Whether it's the winding roads and cute cabins of the Lofoten's gorgeous Moskenesøya Island, or the deep and colossal fjords of the southwest with those skinny, spiky peaks... nature just won't stop surprising you behind every corner.



THE NORTHERN ISLANDS

Never toured before



We flew ourselves and our Sequoias up to Tromsø, one of the northern-most cities of Norway, and started cycling after a few days of getting our things and minds together for this monumental adventure we were about to face. In those first few days we discovered that early June isn't for the weak-kneed – snow still covers most of the Arctic up until July! But as we were aiming for the islands rather than the mainland, that quickly became less of an issue due to the Gulf Stream which warms up the water, bringing a much milder and more stable climate to these northern islands.

It took us a few weeks to adapt to the lifestyle and to each other as we both clearly had different speeds and stamina. Belén suffered at the beginning: her legs hurt, and the nights were too cold. This brought a few tears to her eyes, but she was full of determination. How can you not be if you've given up your stability and comfort to dedicate your foreseeable future to traveling around Europe by bicycle. It took some pushing at first but eventually we were cycling further and further every day. And the speeds evened themselves out, as one of us would stay ahead and wait for the other to catch up over a small distance. A lot of photography breaks and snack stops served to make life easier.

And now... it's time to fill in your empty page, start your own adventure, maybe even change your life.

We hope you've enjoyed our book and got personal value out of it. Are you ready to travel by bicycle?

Just in case you don't know for sure, but would really like to give it a try, you can start by joining us on a guided group tour on:

tristanbogaard.com/guidedcycling

Sign up for a bicycle tour of your liking, pack up the basics, and ride along with us to learn even more about this way of traveling first hand, as well as improving your photography and video-making skills. It will make you realize the world is at your pedals!

See you on the road,
Tristan & Belén

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