

Around the World on Bicycles

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Cyclist couple Cynthia Cattin and Mike Wyss from Switzerland during their Muscat stopover

They are living a dream that many only conceive, and some struggle to achieve.

Cynthia Cattin and Mike Wyss are having the best moments of their lives – touring around the world; but what makes their sojourn unique is that they are doing so on just two wheels.

"After Mike and I found each other, we decided to make a world trip, but we didn't know how. That was ten years ago. Then he had the idea to go on a bicycle tour of the world," said Cynthia, the chirpier of the two.

Having begun their journey from their home in Switzerland on April 1 this year, the couple journeyed through Europe to reach Oman.

The sultanate was the best place for them on their entire trip. "The people were very friendly. We felt very welcome and were given our freedom here, instead of being hounded, as happened in a few other countries. We felt accepted the way we are, and we didn't have to compromise anything," said Cynthia.

The best experiences they had while in the sultanate were their stay in the fishing village of AsrarBaniSaad, the trip to Badiyan Fort, and watching turtles at Ras al Jinz. They also attained a personal milestone in Oman – completing 10,000km.

Cynthia and Mike spent a decade making sacrifices and preparing to fulfill their dream. They slogged hard at their daily jobs, took on extra work and built up their savings. At the end of 12 years during which they hardly found time to spend together, they sold off all their belongings and set out to create memories.

"Many people say they would love to do this (travel the world), but then come up with the smallest of excuses, like having a pet, or their job. We also had those, but we resolved to give them away. You have to be brave and have the courage to sell everything, it's not easy," said Cynthia.

On preparing for the epic odyssey, Mike said, "We cycled together from Switzerland to Venice, which is 1,000km. On that trip we were able to gauge our requirements for the world trip."

The couple ensure that they can reach a big city in three days in case of emergency, and also to service their bicycles.

Eight months into their circuit, which will end in Australia about a year from now, have they had any thoughts about returning home? "Never," said the two together. "We are very, very happy. This has been our best decision ever. Home is in the mind, so we are at home wherever we go. We are home to each other," said Mike. "We do miss our family for sure, but we will not return just because we miss them," said a resolute Cynthia."

Their world tour comes with a mission. The two wish to raise funds for Co-operaid – an organisation that supports education for children in Asia and Africa.

The duo credits their family for being a "massive" support system. "They egged us on and gave us a lot of freedom," said Mike.

They write their family and friends post cards, e-mail them and keep in touch through WhatsApp. Their website, www.pedaleurs.ch is also a medium for their family and friends to keep track of their trails and give them feedback.

Coming from Switzerland, which has a cycling tradition, Cynthia and Mike assessed this arena in Oman. "There is a perception that Oman is not good for cycling, but that's not true. Although it's a fact that there are hardly any cyclists, but this place is fabulous place for cycling. It has wonderful roads and there is space for safety," said Cynthia.

The duo felt that because there aren't many cyclists in the sultanate, motorists do not expect them on the roads. Which is why they chose not to ride post sunset. "So we would put up our tents at 5pm and sleep by 7pm," said Mike.

The lack of cycling culture is understandable in a hot country like Oman. But the cyclists have an advice - for the sake of the environment and for reducing road traffic. "If your office is 2km away, take a cycle instead of a car, if the weather permits," said Mike, who used to cycle 7km to work.

"Riding a bicycle blows away all your worries with the wind and brings you closer to nature," said Cynthia.

"Sitting in a car, your view of the outside world is limited and not direct. We wouldn't change it to anything else. Maybe, we will never buy a car."