

Together with our OKA from Germany to Uruguay on the Grimaldi RoCo freighter "Grande Costa d'Avorio"

Leg details

Date January 15 - February 20, 2013

Leg Hamburg (Germany) - Antwerp (Belgium) - Le Havre (France) - Dakar (Senegal) - Santos (Brazil) - Zárate (Argentina) - Montevideo (Uruguay)

PDF



Leg map (click to enlarge in separate window)



On Tuesday, January 15 2013, we leave Ruedi's sister Heidi, her husband Peter and Heidi's son Simon and **Hüttikon**, our "home" of the last 13 months. We head over to **Nussbaumen** for a last goodbye to Ruedi's parents. Will we see them again and will they still recognise us when we come back? They are 90 and 89 after all

The weather has changed during the day and we get the first bit of the coming winter freezing rain Luckily it is not even 50 km to **Murg** in Germany, where we will stay at AluStar until Friday to fix the last few things on the OKA that require attention.

On Friday it is time to say good bye to our friends at AluStar and leave towards the north. We are expected near **Aachen (Germany)**, some 580 km in northerly direction on Saturday. We are lucky with the weather and even though there is a bit of snow everywhere the roads are fine. We reach Tom and Dagmar, friends we had made in Africa, without any problems.

We have much fun watching their Africa movie and remembering the trip. Time flies and too soon it is time to go to bed.

On Sunday morning we wake up to snow. All is covered in a few cm of fresh snow.

Even though the sun is shining the weather forecast has announced black ice we decide to head towards **Hamburg** right after breakfast. It will be all Autobahn and we hope that we get through before the falling rain turns into freezing rain.

Dear Tom and Dagmar, thanks for having us! It was fun to see you again and to remember the Africa adventures!

As we are getting ready to leave sleet starts falling. Quickly we leave and have no problems between Aachen and Köln. The traffic is restricted to 60 km/h which is just about as fast as it is safe to drive.



After **Köln** the sleet turns to rain and freezes on the windscreen and on the road. Every so often the ice on the windscreen gets so thick that Ruedi has to scrape it off.

Luckily after a while the falling rain changes to snow and we can travel north without any major issues. The lousy road conditions and the weekend keep the traffic to a minimum. Nobody without a good reason would go out in this weather

The roads are covered in salt and the OKA gets a fair bit of salt into the last crevice where water can enter when one drives in rain. This is exactly what we had tried to avoid all year but we cannot change it. We can only hope that we can wash the salt away before the OKA goes on board, as there the water will dry and the salt start damaging the OKA.

In the area of **Osnabrück** the snowfall stops and the road becomes dry. We don't mind at all!

The rest of the trip is easy and we reach **Hamburg** around 6 PM. Luckily on Sunday there is no rush-hour traffic and we easily find our way through the large city. Our host for the next few days, Cuto (a school friend of Susi from Lima) and his family, live in the suburb **Sassel**. We can park the OKA in the garden and soon are in bed. It is freezing cold and we are happy that our heater works fine.



On Monday morning we wake up to the sound of snow shovelling. We check and see Cuto shovelling the garage entry so his wife Angelika can go to work with the car ... nice. It has snowed a few centimetres and all is covered in white. The sun makes it look really nice, the crystals sparkle, lovely. But it is -10°C outside and we enjoy the 20°C in the camper!

Today Cuto wants to show us the city and the harbour, so we get an idea where we have to go to embark. Most water ways are almost completely frozen.

As we reach the harbour we can see a Grimaldi there, but it is not yet our ferry. Ruedi tracks the way and we are sure that we will manage to get there without problem.

In the afternoon we are informed by our agent that we will embark on Wednesday in the afternoon. In the evening Angelika comes home and Ruedi and Cuto use her car to pick up Cuto's car from the garage. His Audi has had a problem with a leaking radiator which should be fixed now. Later on we show them some parts of our movies.

On Tuesday morning we pack and get the OKA ready. The driver's cabin is emptied completely even the teddy bears are removed! The window shutters are screwed down from inside so they cannot be opened anymore. Brute force and a crowbar would be required

In the afternoon we pick up Angelika from work and head to a large Shopping Centre to eat dinner. We use Cuto's Audi to get there.

When we get out of the car we can smell cooling agent the car is leaking a bit again and Cuto is not happy. When we return from dinner Cuto checks the cooling water container and as it is missing some fluid opens the cap to top it up. That turns out to be a mistake as now a lot of water runs out from underneath the car!

This is a massive leak he has! We get some water in the shopping centre and top it up again but after filling in more than 3 lt of water we decide that this is not the way we should drive the car.

It is too late to call the garage so all we can do is call the ADAC and have the car towed to Cuto's garage.
Cuto is not happy at all

We are dropped at the garage and leave the car in the entrance.
Luckily the garage is only some 30 minutes' walk from Cuto's home.

When we reach home we discuss the situation.

It is by now some -17°C and the car only has water in his cooling system.

Ruedi and Cuto decide to head back and add some anti-freeze agent to it so it does not freeze and damage the engine block.

After this evening we just feel like having some Amarula that we have in the OKA and go to bed.
What an evening!

On Wednesday, January 23, we get ready to leave Cuto and Angelika.

Dear Cuto and Angelika, thanks for having us!



We drive down to the car wash Cuto had shown us but it is not high enough for the OKA.

We fill one tank of the OKA with diesel as we don't want to arrive in Montevideo and as first thing in a foreign country look for fuel.

We don't want to fill both tanks as the OKA has to carry 2 extra spare tires, 2 leave springs and some material we have with us for our friends in Argentina.

Over all the OKA carries an extra 150 kg in weight.

We don't want to stress the poor vehicle more than necessary and leave one water tank and one diesel tank empty to compensate.

We take Cuto to his garage and drive down to the port.

The port is huge and has many different sites for the different companies.

Luckily the GPS map is correct and shortly after noon we find the entry to the building at Unikai/Schuppen 48 (GPS: N 53° 31.703', O 10° 0.7') where the Grimaldi ships are handled.

We are too early and are informed to be back by 5 PM.

This gives us time to find a truck wash and have the salt removed from the OKA.

We ask the friendly gentlemen at the desk if he knows one and he gives us a description to the next Autohof.



As we drive out of the parking lot we are ordered by the police to follow them.

We wonder what is wrong now

It turns out that it is customs that is randomly checking the content of the trucks leaving the harbour.

Even though we tell them that we are a camper we have to stay in line and have the content x-ray checked.

It is quite interesting to watch.

The mobile x-ray unit is mounted on a truck and can be used on any parking lot.

The vehicle to be checked has to park, the driver has to leave the truck and has a last chance to declare something that should not be exposed to x-ray.

Then the x-ray truck slowly drives past the vehicle and checks its content.

We ask the officer what they are looking for.

He replies that they are searching mainly for arms and smuggled cigarettes but every so often also find illegal immigrants

After some fantastic guidance of Susi and our GPS we find the Autohof but there is no truck wash here.

It is a pretty crummy excuse of an Autohof with a large parking area where trucks can wait for their call to pick up or deliver their goods.

But they have to pay for that!

And there are no services just a rather filthy shack so called restaurant.

While Ruedi stays with the OKA in the crammed area (he has to move the OKA every so often when a truck has to leave the waiting area) Susi goes and asks around if somebody knows a truck wash.

Most of the truckies are not from Hamburg but finally she strikes it lucky and gets good instructions.

The Shell in Georgswerder (GPS: N 53° 31.139', O 10° 1.281') is the place to go.

The truck wash machine is broken down and the OKA will get a hand wash ... which will take at least 45 minutes!

Luckily the service station also has a large restaurant where we have some Schnitzel and French fries huge portion!

As we eat we see a yellow Duro drive past.

They must be Swiss and they must be looking for the car wash!

Ruedi runs out of the restaurant and finds them.

They are Angelika and Simon and they will ship their Duro to Buenos Aires.

But they will ship it on the Grimaldi "Grande Camoroon", fly to Argentina and use the time that the vehicle need to get there to learn Spanish.

We exchange addresses and will get in contact once we are in Argentina.

Before 5 PM we return to the Unikai terminal and get the paperwork done.

Shortly after we are escorted to the Grimaldi Grande Costa d'Avorio that will be our home for the next 4 weeks.



We are welcomed by the captain Giovan and the chief mate.

The ship is not ready yet to take our camper on board.

We will have to drive it in tomorrow at approx. 8 AM. This means that the OKA will stay out in the freezing cold over night. This is kind of a worry to us because of the water in the tanks. Even so the tanks are inside the backsection it could be freezing and this could at least damage the pipes and the faucet.



The crew is international.

The navigation part is done by Italian officers.

The cook is Italian.

The steward for the officers and the passengers is Italian and the one for the crew is a Filipino.

The technical part incl. the engine room is manned with Filipino officers and a Filipino crew.

So we take our belongings and head up to the 11 deck, where we are greeted by Vincenzo, the steward.



He shows us our cabin, the owner's cabin, which we have received from Grimaldi as upgrade because they changed our departure date 3 times. It is nice, with a large salon, Sat-TV, stereo and windows!
All the other passenger cabins don't have windows on this ship



Shortly after we are on the way to explore the ship.
A strong wind blows and makes the already low temperatures feel even colder.
The water around the ship has large ice chunks in it.

We are not really hungry after the large lunch we had but still cannot say no to the pasta.
Then we happily sink into bed and are glad that we have made it on board.

But somehow we cannot sleep.
We go through all the things and check if all was done that we were supposed to.
Then we remember that we forgot to turn on the heater in the OKA to protect the water from freezing.
So Ruedi gets dressed again and goes to the OKA to turn on the heater.
Then we fall asleep.

Next morning we get up early to be ready when we should drive the OKA in.
We are afraid of that it will be also too cold inside if the ship and that the water cold freeze there too so we empty the filters, the pumps and the pipes but leave some water in the tanks. There it can extend and there is no risk of breaking.

By 8 AM we are still not called in so Ruedi goes and asks.
Ahhhhh it will be 11 AM before we are loaded.
Ok, so we go for breakfast.
Then we are busy to get some more stuff out of the OKA for the cabin.

At 11 AM we check with the chief mate but he is very stressed and says that we should go for lunch and they will call us.
By coincidence the captain is close by and is not impressed about this, as the ship is due to sail at 3 PM.



We find out that Thursdays and Sundays the menu at lunch starts with anti-pasto.
Then we have pasta, meat, fruit we will have to pay attention to our already stressed waste line!

After lunch we wait in our room and wait and it is 1 PM then 1:30 PM no call.
Ruedi gets really nervous and wants to go down and just drive the OKA in.
Then the phone rings and we are asked to fetch the OKA.



As last piece of cargo the OKA is allowed on board.
[Click here for a movie on the loading of the OKA](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 1'928 KB).

This means that in Antwerp we will have to drive it out before they can start loading again.
That is ok, as long as it is on board now.

Then the ramp is lifted and shortly after 3 PM the ship leaves the quay.



We get dressed and head outside.
Due to the speed of the ship the wind is now even stronger.
The only place where it is bearable is just behind the bridge.

Many of the crew have been exchanged in Hamburg.
The transition at officer level is done between ports.
This means that the "old" captain is still on board and also navigates the ship down the Elbe.
The new captain will then navigate the ship up to Antwerp.



We sail past some dry docks and technical installations

.... the new landmark of Hamburg a building by the famous designer Hundertwasser, which will become the "Elbphilharmonie"



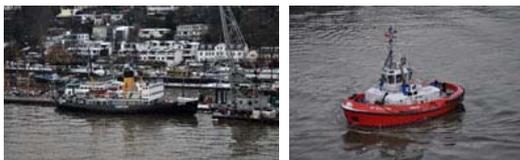
.... downtown and the many ferry terminals some colourful houses



... some parts of the old harbour where the houses have been renovated and some new condominium buildings built in between



... the passenger-ship terminal



... an ice breaker and a cute tug



Then the pilot is picked up and we are on our way.



There is a lot of traffic on the river.



We sail past the Airbus Industries



..... **Blankenese** where in 2005 Ruedi's father had waved us goodbye when we sailed to Australia on the "**CMA CGM Matisse**".
[Click here to read the journal](#)



The **Hamburger Jachthafen Wedel** plays the Italian national anthem
They always play the national anthem of the passing ship, on entry and on exit. Nice!

At 5 PM we have to be at the officers mess room for a security briefing.
 As we will be heading out into the open sea we need to know what to do in case of an emergency.
 The Filipino steward Jieson has to demonstrate all.
 He is rather light built and could fit twice in the survival suit!



Then it is dinner time ... with cake for desert!
 And what a cake!!!!



On Friday we wake up to a pretty sunrise.
 But as we get closer to the entry of the Schelde, the river leading to Antwerp, it gets foggy.



By 11 AM the Dutch pilot arrives.
 We sail past Holland and its dykes, which protect the cities behind it.



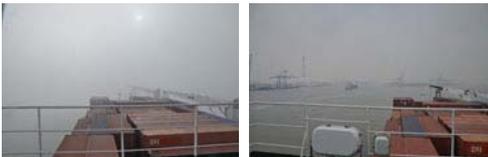
It is funny to see the Dutch summer resorts with snow



... the modern beach resorts



... the traditional villages



At times the fog gets really thick



... and it is freezing cold the windshield factor adding to the sub-zero temperatures!



The captain opens the door and allows us to get into the bridge.

At approx. 12:30 AM there is a change in pilots.
 The Belgian pilot tells us that the fog was so thick this morning that they had problems navigating in the harbour.



Some funny looking boats that are used to push barges sail past .



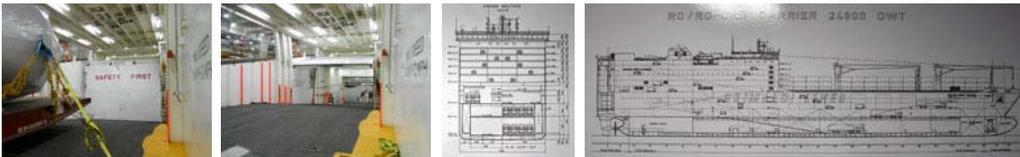
The petrochemical plant produces lots of steam ... hopefully not smoke



We sail past many sluices and shortly before 5 PM are pushed into one. It is done very gently as the Grande Costa d'Avorio is over 200 m long and there is not too much space left in front and behind the ship. On the side there is just enough space for a small tanker.



Around 6 PM we reach the harbour of **Antwerp**. Close to 7 PM, after the paperwork has been finished, Ruedi is calls below deck to get ready to drive the OKA out.



Deck 2 is opened and that is where the OKA will be stationed later on too. This is good as it has a door that will not be opened in Dakar which means that we will not have to guard the vehicles. That is good news.



On Saturday morning we get ready to go into town. We want to have Internet access, probably the last one before we reach Uruguay.



But first Ruedi cleans the solar panels in hope that there will be enough sun to reload the batteries a bit. The backsection will have to be heated for another day again to avoid freezing of the water. Even though we always disconnect the batteries during the trip, driving in and out and the heating has used a fair amount of power. The batteries are a bit of a worry for us as we don't like them to be nearly empty during the long trip. Containers and vehicles are loaded and there is a lot of activity.

As we wait outside to find transport to the gate a Scania camper drives towards the ship. These are the passengers from Luxembourg, Gaby and Tony. We head into town.



One of the main buildings is the railroad station.



It is a very pretty old building that has been converted into a modern train station with lots of shops and 5 levels of subterranean rails.



After finishing our Internet business at the local McDonalds we go for a walk along the many interesting buildings in the CBD.



Traditional buildings are very prettily restored.



The city has a lot of character.



We like the Australian ice cream shop.
Even though it is snowing by now they have customers ...

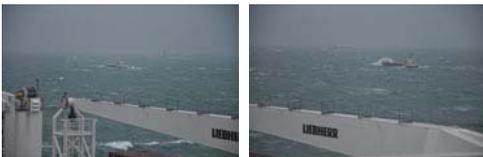


Then it is time to return to the ship.

Around 11 PM we leave Antwerp.
As soon as we leave the protected waters the ship starts pitching.
We are not disturbed by this and sleep well.



On Sunday, January 27, after breakfast we head straight to the bridge.



We can watch the smaller ships in the storm.
It would be interesting to see our own ship!



We have wind of 48 knots.
To walk on deck to the bridge is quite a job

At lunch we hear that the captain's wife Mariella is really sick.
It is her first trip on a ship and she is not used to it at all.



The passengers are fine and we all come for lunch.



It is Sunday the special day with anti-pasto and the works including some really good cake again.
We reach the coast by mid-afternoon but the pilot only comes on board around 9 PM.



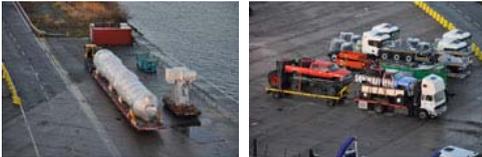
It is close to 10 PM when we reach the sluice "Ecluse Francois 1" and enter the harbour of **Le Havre**.



On Monday morning we wake up to another sunny morning.
The full moon is just setting behind the Grimaldi "Grande Nigeria".
We were supposed to travel on the Grande Nigeria but then Grimaldi changed its schedule and we were re-booked onto the Grande Costa d'Avorio.
The Grande Nigeria is currently taking the space that our ship is supposed to have.
It is scheduled to leave and then our ship will be "re-parked" on that spot.



We watch the activities around the ship.



The large pipe that was loaded in Hamburg and was unloaded in Antwerp is again sitting on the quay.
Some trucks, heavily loaded with spare parts and tyres or even other trucks, are waiting to be driven on board.
The cost for the transport goes by m3 and not by weight, so it makes sense to load the trucks as much as possible.



Many cars are already lined up to be loaded.



At the entry the paperwork is done and then the car is driven on to the corresponding deck.
Then a small bus picks up the drivers so they can drive the next group of cars into the ships.

[Click here for a movie on the loading of the cars](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 6'741 KB).



We want to get some more stuff from the OKA and ask one of the sailors to please open the door to deck 2 for us.



We are surprised to see how full the deck is.



To get to the OKA we have to squeeze between vehicles and climb over chains that are used to fix them.



Outside of the door to deck 2 there are containers containing meat for Dakar, probably for the French troops in Mali. We like the indicator of the temperature

As it is a nice day we decide to leave the ship and investigate the vehicles on the quay.



Just beside a trailer we find a strange looking vehicle, a Nomad 65, which is marked to be shipped to Saudi Arabia and wonder, what it is for. We hear later on that it is used to compact sand and send out seismic signals used to find oil below the desert interesting



The loaded container are additionally secured with straps.

Then a small camper arrives with the French passengers Theresia and Pierre. Now we are complete.



In the afternoon we change places but not to the place of the Grande Nigeria ... she is still here even though her schedule says that she should be gone by now



While the loading continues we watch "Avatar" in the officers mess room We have a lot of movies on the computer and on CDs and can provide entertainment to our co-passengers.



On Tuesday morning it is raining and not very pleasant outside, a perfect day for some house-keeping and washing.

We also start preparing the South-America trip. Before leaving we had collected prospectus of different companies that offer trips on that continent. Now we transfer their visited points of interest to the maps we have. This will show us where the major tourist attractions are.

In the evening the passengers ask, if we have some more movies they can watch, so we watch "Night at the museum".



Around 10 PM the ramp is lifted.



We can watch how the officers handle it and have an insight into the process.



By the time we leave the Grande Nigeria is still in port.

The captain explains that the storm that we had on the way to Le Havre has calmed down now but a second storm is expected to reach the Bay of Biscay tomorrow evening and is expected to reach strength 10 the one we had was strength 4 - 5

Our captain has decided to do sail now and cross the Bay of Biscay between the two storms.

The captain of the Grande Nigeria has decided to sit out the storm in Le Havre.

The final decision and responsibility on sailing always is with the captain of the ship, not with the company.

We leave the port of Le Havre through the sluice "Ecluse Francois 1" again.

Then the ship moves very slowly through the channel as on the way out we have to cross the Grimaldi "Grande Senegal".

By 1 AM we have reached the open water and the pilot is picked up.

Time to go to bed

During the night the storm really breaks loose.

The ship rolls and pitches ... all together it is a bit like riding a roller coaster



In the morning the first thing we do is go up to the bridge to watch the waves brake over the front of the ship.

[Click here for a movie of the storm](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 3'420 KB).

At breakfast time Toni and Mariella don't show up they rather stay in horizontal position

We enjoy the storm and the waves.

If the ship hits a nice big wave the speed is reduced from 16 to 13 knots!

But after a couple of really nice breakers the captain comes to the bridge too and orders that the speed is reduced.

With this rolling and pitching it is possible the best place to be is in bed ... maybe reading a book ...

We find that the best thing to do in such a storm is to imagine that one is in a large warm pool and the rolling and pitching is the waves that move the body around very nice feeling

The storm lasts all day and we don't see much of Toni or the captain's wife Mariella

After 9 PM we have made it and the storm quietens down, just a gentle rolling remains, excellent for a good night's sleep

On Thursday morning everybody is up and eating again.

After breakfast all passengers and also Mariella get together to learn Spanish.

As Susi has grown up in Lima, Peru, she becomes the "teacher" of the little group.

The levels are very different, from beginner (Ruedi, Toni) to intermediate (Theresia, Pierre) to easy learning (Mariella) we have a lot of fun.

After lunch we leave the Bay of Biscay and the weather calms down.

We don't mind as now we can work on the PCs again.

It was not really possible before as sitting and looking down does not mix well with heavy rolling and pitching



In the later afternoon we are invited for the welcome drink.

The officers only get juice as it is not allowed for any members of the crew to consume alcohol on board of the vessel at any time.

The passengers get Amaretto with juice ... nice!

The captain gives a short information on the planned trip.

He tells us that we will not stop in Rio de Janeiro but go straight from Dakar to Santos.

That is a bit sad as the entry into Rio is quite nice.

Then the captain also says that we are not allowed on the bridge anymore during manoeuvring.

That is very sad, as that is usually the spot to be well, so be it.

In the evening the passengers ask for another movie and we watch "Crocodile Dundee I" in French with German subtitles

During the night we have to change our clocks back by one hour.



On Friday the storm is definitively over and the sun is shining.

It is also not too cold anymore.

After the Spanish class we take advantage of the good weather and go for a walk.



The crew has started the maintenance jobs.

One of them is to clean the filters of the ventilation for the car decks.

The decks don't have aircon, just fresh air is pumped down for cooling.





The pilot comes on board.
 It is the first pilot that does not wear a survival suit when he changes from the pilot vessel to out ship.
 Probably the water is much warmer here.
 In Europe with the very cold temperatures a person would have less than 10 minutes live expectancy in the water without a suit.



On the way into the harbour we pass some colourful fishing boats.



The harbour has an old part and a new, very modern part, which was built by the Chinese.
 China is slowly buying its ways into the world



We can watch rice being unloaded in a traditional way from a freighter ... bags tight together by ropes lowered down to the jetty ...



There they are loaded onto trucks and driven out of the port.



Every so often a bag breaks open or is "accidentally" damaged

The rice is collected by the workers and filled into small bags.
 Some of them made from trousers where the legs have been tied up thus forming a comfortable bag, which can be carried easily around the neck.

People then try to smuggle the rice bags past the guard at the entry of the port.
 As soon as the guard appears they all hide behind the containers.

While we watch the guard makes their life miserable they have to stay hidden.
 Then we see an old car approaching.
 The car is stopped and a man dressed in a slightly off-white Arabic tunic gets out.
 The men discuss something, then all bags are loaded into the car, the men get into the car and all is driven out of the port



Things are just a bit different in Dakar security at work safe boats



We come past the military port and the fishing harbour



... old colonial buildings cars that must have been waiting for their new owners for a while



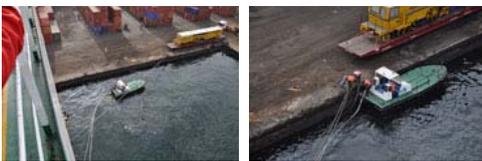
Shipping companies like CMA CGM have their offices close to the harbour. One building in particular captures our attention with its unconventionally built



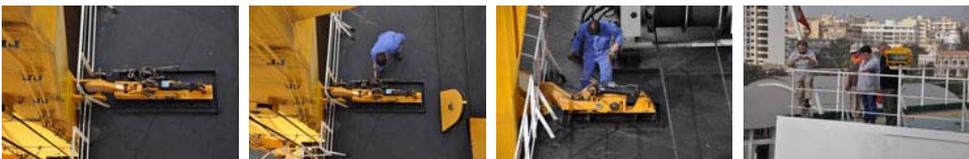
Just beside the ferry terminal we reach our quay.



Amazing what is stored here



The ropes are transported ashore.



The safety pins are removed and the hook released to the ramp can be lowered.



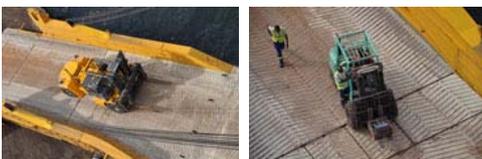
As soon as the ramp has been lowered the majority of the men that have been waiting come aboard



... the customs and immigration officials ... the drivers for the cars and the ones that we rather don't have on board.

During our stay on Dakar all doors have to be kept locked.
The doors to the stairways are locked and even to use the elevator a key is required ... they sure know why!
We are happy that our OKA is in deck 2 and that this deck will not be opened here

The other passengers decide to go into town.
We decide to stay on board and watch what is happening.



The ship's own forklift is driven out the ports battery pack and jumper leads are driven in to jump start vehicles



The long chimney that was loaded in Hamburg is driven out ... like in all other ports before ... to make space for other things to be unloaded.



Freezer containers are unloaded.

At one container they forget to unplug the power cable and have to get the container back on board to get this done. We just watch and wonder it is all a bit different, a bit more chaotic, a bit "African"

[Click here for a movie of the unloading](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 2'490 KB).



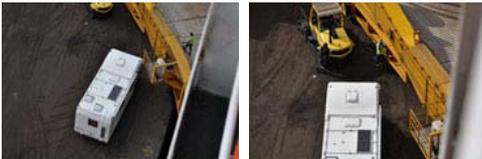
The driver of the crane that handles containers is very good in manoeuvring the containers through the narrow alleys.



[Click here for a movie of the handling](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 3'998 KB).



We are a bit surprised to see that the freezer containers are actually connected with power again as soon as they are unloaded

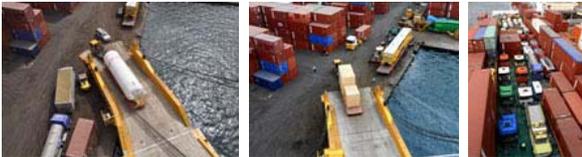


A French camper has to be loaded but the driver does not realize that the ramp has a small "balcony" on its side

The sound of the crushing cabin can even be heard on deck 11 where we are ... some 30 m above ground

We are surprised to see that the driver actually reports the damage, gets some staff from the Grimaldi and some photos are taken and forms filled out.

Still, it will be annoying on Montevideo when the owner picks up his camper



Grimaldi runs different services, to Africa, South America, south bound, north bound etc.

For Grimaldi Dakar is a port where they reload cargo from one service to the other.

We can watch large pieces of cargo being loaded and also cargo, especially trucks, being rearranged so they don't block other cargo from being unloaded in other ports.



The local crew manages the unloading / loading and the Grimaldi staff keeps track on what is handled. They also have to make sure that the cargo is placed in the correct position.



In the afternoon we can watch hundreds of kites flying around over the city and wonder if there are so many mice and rats in the city or what they live off

Around 9 PM we leave Dakar.

When we ask the officer in charge for health issues on board how they managed to get into the harbour with the sick person on board he looks at us and with a grin and says"..... what sick person? He has reported to duty today" .

The next few days pass quickly with Spanish classes, watching movies, gathering information on South-America etc.

Then on Friday, February 8, the big day comes: The crossing of the equator!

We had already told the officers and the captain that we had been baptised on previous trips.

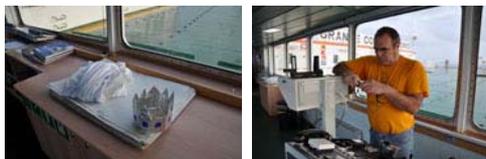
But for Toni and Gaby it is the first crossing.

And Theresia and Pierre, even though they had already crossed the equator 7 times they had never been baptised!

So the list of people to be baptised is:

4 passengers, Jieson the steward, the two cadets Emanuele and Umberto, one of the Filipino crew from the machine room and the captain's wife!

We have been eating with two officers and know that one of them, we called him Pavarotti because of his size and look, will play Neptune.



Around 9 AM we go to the bridge.
Jieson had already prepared a crown and fork.
Ruedi gets organised with the GPS so he does not miss the passing of the equator.
He wants to take the exact GPS position.



Emanuele and two officers work on Neptune's dress.



The captain comes to have a look and lend a hand.



Outside the deck is being cleaned for the party.



Humberto, Eduardo and the machinist are a bit uncertain on what will happen to them.

We tell Mariella all sorts of stories one of them being that the ship will shake when sailing over the equator and the captain plays along and even makes the stories wilder

Poor Mariella doesn't know what to believe and we have a good laugh



At 9:32 AM we cross the equator!



One after the other the crew members get an "X" for "crossing" cut into their hair.
Umberto is the first one to get the treatment he doesn't mind with his already short hair



Emanuele has well-presented longer hair but what can he do smile



.. same with the Filipino crew member



Then it is Jieson's turn. Mariella tries to save him but the captain says, only if she offers to take his place



Group picture with Neptune



Vincenzo arrives with the drinks.



At 10 AM the passengers and crew members arrive. They are a bit worried about the activities on the bridge



The captain randomly picks a few crew members with longer hair and also applies the hair clippers to their hair much to the amusement of the crew and passengers ...



... but less to the pleasure of the members themselves



the next step is that eggs are smashed on the heads of the crew members



... then chocolate sauce pored over everybody's heads



Toni looks great!



Mariella tries to escape but the captain gets her and she also gets her share of chocolate sauce ...



Finally the captain gets the fire hose and all candidates get a good bath of salt water



... while we have good fun



After a well-deserved shower it is time for drinks!



The crew is already cleaning up the mess



At dinner time the captain distributes the certificates.



This crew member sure has made the best of his hair cut



Ruedi never forgets to take the position of the ship twice a day and keeps track of where we currently are



The amount of meet on the BBQ seems large



... but the appetite is large too



The cook comes to the party too



... and the officer on duty enjoys a quiet moment with Neptune's crown

Over night the clocks are set back by one hour again.

At 3:30 AM all the passengers and the crew are woken up by the smell of fresh pizza, onions and cooking

The cook has changed the time of his alarm in the wrong direction!!!!

It is the story of the day!!

On Sunday morning we have time to visit the bridge and have a closer look at some things like ...



... the navigation bridge with the radars



... the fire indication panel, status indicator panel of hatches and water intrusion, VHF signal range plan



... the alphabet in flags, used in ports to mark the status of the ship e.g. if the yellow flag is flying it means "Q" and that the quarantine has not yet been lifted for the ship



In the afternoon we have a fire drill.

The passengers have to be present in the mess room ...



... with our stewards



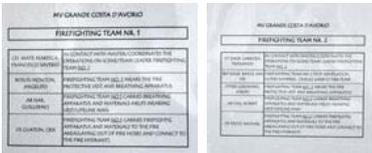
The crew is also waiting



Then the alarm sounds and we have to go to the muster station.

This time the chief mate only quickly counts the passengers without trying to spell their names, then reports to the bridge that all passengers are present.

We can go back to the mess room and watch through the window how the crew has to fight a "fire" in the laundry.



We can watch the teams run around in breathing apparatus and handle hoses and fire extinguishers.

Then the abandon ship signal sounds and the crew gets the instruction to lower the life boats without people on board this time

Sadly again we are not allowed to take pictures

In the evening we show our Africa movie and the captain and Mariella also come. We tell the story in French and English and the captain translate for Mariella into Italian. She decides that she will go to intensive English classes once she is back home in Palermo

The days go by quickly.

On Tuesday the menu says Calamari

We can smell it long before Vincenzo brings it to the table.

Pierre is allergic to fish and turns white in no time.

Quickly he runs outside to feed the fishes

Toni and Gaby, the only of the passenger group that eat fish this time return it it has been dead too long

We wonder if the cook will serve this to the captain or change the menu

The next day in Spanish class Mariella tells us that it was served to them ... and they too had decided to not to eat it we wonder how this could happen to the cook

he should have smelled it long before he had cooked it!

Luckily nobody got sick from it!

It is worth to say that he is a very good cook and that this was the only glitch he had on the whole trip except of cooking pizza at 3:30 in the morning

Later on we cross the Grimaldi vessel Grande Buenos Aires ... we were booked on that ship originally

We sail through oil rigs for hours.

As it gets dark they look like Christmas trees with all their lights on.



On Monday, February 13, we reach Santos in Brazil and mainland South America.



We have to wait with many other ships until it is our turn to receive the pilot on board.

A large kind of cloud hangs over the city smog?



Some boats are unloaded / loaded outside of the harbour.

Special boats are there to move the cargo from one ship to the other one.

Large groups of dolphins come for a visit.

We are told that the river brings a lot of nutrients and therefore there is very rich fish life where the saltwater and the fresh water mixes.



In the late afternoon we start moving towards the river.

The city is very large.

The whole southern coastal strip is covered with tall buildings.



The northern side of the river houses mainly small houses and older buildings.



The city seems to be doing well.

It is nice to see that colonial buildings are renovated and not just turn down to be replaced by new high-rise buildings.



Men in a small boat and on surfboards paddle towards the ship.

Once we pass they take advantage of the waves that are generated by the ship for a short surf session



We sail past the large favelas small houses built on the swamps on stilts



The harbour is built along the river.
We sail past all different kinds of unloading areas



Sometimes ships are tight to other ships to deliver cargo.



For a long time we sail up the river



... past the city colonial buildings an oil refinery



A thunderstorm is coming closer and closer but we manage to reach our final destination before it reaches us.
The ship will be unloaded over night.
We decide not to go ashore.
We don't fancy visiting large cities at night ... especially not, if it is the first visit to a country, we don't yet have the correct currency, don't know where to go



On Thursday we wake up to a sunny day.
Around 8 AM the ship leaves again.



It is great to sail down the river and being able to see all the things that we missed yesterday in the darkness.



The city has many colonial buildings



..... some of the ships are in good shape some in worse



We enjoy the sights.
It is a great harbour to visit on a ship.



Large parts of life seem to happen on the water.
Small ships carry people from one side of the river to the other, tugs push other ships around



... a shipyard the fire brigade



..... the favelas
If a house needs to be enlarged they bang poles into the mud and build another room with whatever material they can organise



There are many different products being loaded sugar lemon juice concentrate



..... vehicles of all sorts grain probably soya fuel of all sorts



The yacht club is located conveniently close to the city



There are no bridges over the river.
The main arterial road stops at a ferry terminal.
The traffic is guided in such a way that the cars drive straight onto a ferry ... as extension of the road
As soon as the ferry is full the traffic lights switch and the cars are guided to the next "road-extension" ferry.
Once the ferry has all cars loaded, the motorbikes are allowed on.
No bicycles or pedestrians are allowed on. They have their own ferry terminal and ferries.



The fishermen's harbour special tugs for offshore normal tugs



Finally we reach the end of the river and the ocean again.



..... Santos and its beaches Brazilian lifestyle



The ship is guided through the waiting ships and small fishing boats by the pilots.



The crew is still busy sending messages to their loved ones some of them even handle two mobile phones at the same time! Maybe it is because today it is February 14 Valentine's Day?????

Vincenzo's phone card does not work and he wanted to send an SMS to his girlfriend. We give him our Sat-phone so he can call her much to his delight

For breakfast we all get a strawberry yoghurt from Theresia, as Valentine's present. She has some long-life ones and they are really good! Thanks again Theresia!

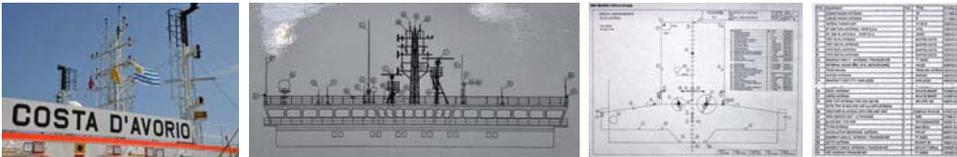
In the afternoon we have Spanish classes.

Mariella tells us that a container containing perfume and alcohol had been broken up and that goods had been stolen. She had been ashore with the captain and when they came back to the ship the police had been here to inspect the case. But they think that the theft had already been done in le Havre, where the container had been loaded, because the only authority knowing its content is the customs office where the container is loaded. This makes sense because nobody on board knows what the containers contain except if they have hazardous good loaded.

The whole Friday we sail along the coast of Brazil and have the coastline to the right side. It is a rainy day and we pass the time with Spanish classes, exchanging travel information and watching movies. If one travels on a ship one must bring a lot of things on board to pass the time



On Saturday we sail along Uruguay and close past the Isla de los Lobos, in front of Montevideo. Slowly the blue water of the ocean changes its colour to grey with brown ribbons every so often ... when some sand is stirred up



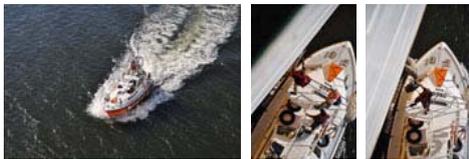
We have a look at all the radars and antennas that are on the roof of the bridge. Amazing!



Today we are allowed down into the engine room. Sadly again the captain does not allow taking pictures of it



Pierre tells us that on the deck where his camper is there are some nice old-timers and plenty of expensive cars all for Argentina



Around 5 PM two pilots comes on board ... with luggage.
The trip through the bay and up the river Parana de las Palmas to Zárate will take almost 24 hours.

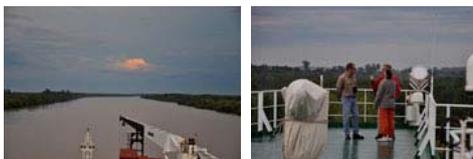


But first we have a problem with the shallows!
The sand that is brought down the various rivers shifts around the bay and the sandbanks are different every day.
The pilot orders the ship to be turned around and picks another route upriver.

We see a cruise liner leave Montevideo and sail towards us.
We see that it is the "Celebrity Infinity", a cruise liner we had seen in Ketchikan, Alaska, in September 2012!
She sails up-river in front of us and then deviates to Buenos Aires while our ship continues on towards the mouth of the river Parana de las Palmas.



In the evening Marialla makes her rounds on the deck she also has a problem with the good food on board
On Sunday morning around 2 AM we sail past Buenos Aires.
The sky is light up



At dawn we get up and straight to the deck.



The sunrise is spectacular!
We have already entered the river Parana de las Palmas.
The water now has changed to brown.



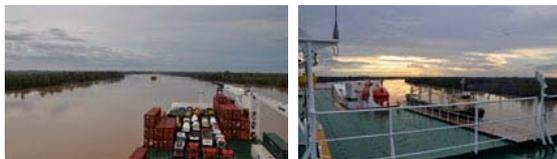
There is all sorts of traffic on the river.
There is a speed boat that comes up river from Tigre.
People go to work with it.
The boats are very loud so potential passengers can hear them in time and flag them down as they pass by.



On both sides of the river there is dense forest.
The trees are partially submerged in water.
Either the river is tidal and it is high tide or it is flooding at the moment.
Every so often a small entrance is visible where side-arms of the huge river system join the main stream.



The river is not very wide and the pilot is busy manoeuvring the ship through the bends.



Especially when larger boats come towards our ship both ships go to the river banks as much as they can.



This gives us the chance to get a bit of insight into the small side channels and its life. As it is Sunday we see many tents along the shore line. Pierre explains to us that a lot of people from Buenos Aires come up here for the weekend to fish. The brown waters of the Parana de las Palmas have a lot of nutrients and are rich on fishes.



And there are the more sophisticated "weekend houses", all with their jetty. All sit on stilts because the Parana has a tendency to flood.



The closer we get to Zárate the more loading facilities are along the river.



Some of them are not really modern the ore is loaded with a conveyor belt that is "fed" with bulldozers but it works and that is all that matters!



But there is also a newer one.



Where ever there is space cars are stored.



There are also special ships that transport sand. The sand is loaded as a slurry with water and then the water pumped off the ship again.



At a refinery black steaming lumps are produced and moved around with bulldozers could it be tar?



There are two rather "sharp" bends in the river shortly before we reach Zárate. We are surprised how easily and at what speed the ship navigates through them



We come past some old and rusty ships.



Side-arms are used as "parking bays" for ships.



One ship is even used in the local caravan park as "hotel" a second one has been transported in a channel to its new resting place probably to become another "hotel"



As we get closer to the town the traffic increases.



At **Zárate** the river is crossed by a large bridge. Underneath it are ruins of old paper factories.



Towards the town there are even more ruins

Before Uruguay became a large player in the paper industry Argentina was one of the large players in the industry. But these times are over, the factories too old to be able to compete against the modern factories in Uruguay



Zárate gives the impression of a town that has seen its glory days



The new port could bring the turn around. Since the car ferries don't unload in Buenos Aires anymore this could be the new way forward. The port is already being enlarged.



There is only one problem: The old factory that sits right behind the large parking area used to produce Zink and the ground is polluted. They have to clean the ground first and this seems to have some legal implications that currently stop the project.



The parking area is already nicely filled. We wonder where the cars from our ship will go

Around 9 AM we reach our spot at the quay.

As the ramp of the ship goes to the right side the ship must be turned around now.

There is no space for the ship to turn around on its own so a tug pulls at the back and the ships assists with the bow-thruster at the front.



Fine ropes with a heavy ball on it are thrown ashore and caught by the local ground staff. They can now pull the heavy hawsers ashore. Once the hawsers have been attached to the anchor points the rope hoists on board of the ship are used to pull the ship towards the quay. Three hawsers per side are used to secure the ship. But one of them suddenly tears! Luckily nobody is hurt.



The ramp has a problem it is blocked somehow The chief mate gets nervous and calls the mechanical engineer. Hmhmhmhm



One of the hooks does not unhook properly!



The chief mate gets all excited the Italian way with a lot of sign language Activity starts and after a good hour they try again and it works!



[Click here for a movie on the lowering of the ramp](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 5'397 KB).



The long pipe is unloaded for the last time.
It seems to belong to some more equipment that could well be part of an oil rig or so
Amazing what all is standing on the pier.

We see the unloading of the old fire engines and trucks that had been on board since Hamburg.
They will still have a long working life here



The vehicles that are unloaded are driven to a check-point where they are inspected for blind passengers
Some empty containers are loaded but placed sideways so they will not interfere with the unloading of the vehicles in Montevideo.

In the afternoon we are allowed to go to the vehicles and start bringing stuff down.
Toni also grabs a video he has about the journeys of Che Guevara that we watch tonight.



The unloading goes all night.



We visit the deck for a photo shooting at night which is only possible in a harbour.
Only then the lights are on.

While travelling the ship only has its position lights on during the night so that the light does not disturb the sight in the dark.



We find a pretty visitor aprox. 8 cm long ... with its smaller friend

On Monday the other passengers go into town.
We decide to stay on boards as we have to finish the movie about the trip that we will present to everybody as goodbye present.

At dinner time we are informed that we have "lost" two crew members; Jieson and another Filipino.
They have fallen ill with chicken pox and have been transferred to the hospital in Zárate.
Two new crew members will be flown in and will join in Victoria when the ship is on its way back to Europe.
As Jieson is one of the sick ones and as steward had contact with almost everybody on board they think that they will have some more cases of chicken pox later on during the journey

By 10 PM all unloading and loading has finished.
During the night we leave Zárate.



At about 5:30 AM we pass Colonia del Sacramento (Uruguay) and during the morning we go into waiting position at Montevideo.

During lunch we hear that the officer that we call Pavarotti has fever we all wait to hear if he too has contracted chicken pox
But in the afternoon he is cleared of it.

The day is passed with washing and packing up.



Late in the afternoon the pilot comes and we sail into **Montevideo**.

On Wednesday, February 20, 2 days ahead of schedule, we are ready to go ashore.
All is packed and already back in the OKA.

Poor Vincenzo has a lot of work to do because with Jieson in hospital he has to clean all passenger cabins on his own.
In Montevideo they are expecting 8 - 9 new passengers.
They are not yet sure if all can make it because the ship is too early and they have not yet been able to contact one of them.

We are informed that we will be allowed ashore after lunch.
This gives us a lot of time for a last visit of the decks.



The last few vehicles are still standing on deck 11 even so the door to the ramp is already open for a long time.



There is plenty of activity in the port but it is a small port in comparison with the other ones we have seen.



They have a ship cemetery right outside of the harbour.



It is also interesting to watch the huge cranes move around with their many wheels. Amazing things!



A bulldozer is unloaded and we watch with amazement, that they use hawsers to drive on so the surface in the port and also the caterpillar tracks of the bulldozer don't get damaged.

The truck is special too as it does not have a ramp at the back as we are used to.



After 2 PM we are allowed to access the vehicles and drive out of the ship.

The officer in charge if the immigration asks the vehicle owners to come with him to finalise the paperwork.

As Susi is the "owner" of the OKA she, Pierre and Toni get into the car and are driven to the BuqueBus terminal.

There we have to wait at a side door for it to be opened.



It seems to be one of the first times that passengers exit with their vehicles in Montevideo the forms are photocopies and are done in duplicate with an old carbon paper ... almost as we are used to from Africa

As neither Toni nor Pierre speak much Spanish Susi acts as translator.

The officer from immigration knows well what has to be filled into the form and gives the man in the office exact instructions.

All is done in no time and at no cost!

We are surprised we are used to visa cost, CO-charges, local fees a.s.o. from Africa and are pleased that this is different here.

Soon we are back at the vehicles and after a final check of the papers drive out of the harbour.

Our destination is Punta Carretas, where according to the guide book one can camp behind the ANCAP service station (GPS: S 34° 55.720', W 056° 09.801').



This is correct and soon we find ourselves parked at the beach with views of the lighthouse, just some 10 minutes on foot from the Punta Carretas shopping centre and this is the end of the journal!

No liability for timeliness, integrity and correctness of this document is accepted.
Last updated: Saturday, 30.03.2013 11:52 AM