

## Together with our OKA from Hamburg (Germany) to Montevideo (Uruguay) on the Grimaldi RoCo freighter "Grande Nigeria"

### Part 1

#### Leg details

**Date** December 7, 2015 - January 14, 2016

**Leg** Hamburg (Germany) - Tilbury (Great Britain) - Antwerp (Belgium) - Dakar (Senegal) - Conakry (Guinea) - Freetown (Sierra Leone) - Vitoria (Brazil) - Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) - Santos (Brazil) - Paranaguá (Brazil) - Zárate (Argentina) - Montevideo (Uruguay)

**PDF**



**Leg map** (click to enlarge in separate window)



Our plan is to return to South America in October 2015.

Due to the delays in building the camper back-section we delay our departure. Additionally we change the departure harbour to Antwerp and are now due to sail on December 2nd. We will leave Switzerland on November 28th right after Ruedi's mum's 92th birthday. So far the plan .....

As usual travelling with a Grimaldi ferry is a bit chaotic ..... ships are exchanged, some added to the schedule some removed .... routes changed, harbors added .... all is very dynamic .....

After our agent updates us for the 5th time on which ship we are supposed to travel we tell him to stop telling us ... but Susi keeps an eye on the official Grimaldi schedule so we more or less know when we will travel.

The ship's departure shifts into December.

We don't mind at all as this way we get more time .... and we really needed it!

Not only is the camper still a chaos but on November 6th, when travelling to Switzerland for a party, we have a severe damage to the rear axle.

The wheel bearings overheat.

This causes over-pressure in the hub which presses the grease and oil out of the axle ..... onto the hot disk rotor ..... where it catches fire .....

Luckily we are able to extinguish the fire in time!

If the tires would have caught fire the camper would have burned down ..... 10 meters beside a petrol station!

The OKA has to be towed back to Germany .... the first time since we have it ....

There the mechanic is already waiting to find out what has caused this disaster: Too much tension on the wheel bearings ..... Why did this happen? Not a clue because the mechanics worked exactly as told by Ruedi and Ruedi did that job already several times without any troubles.

Luckily the damage caused to the axles is minimal .... the bearings and caskets have to be replacing, everything else is fine.

But due to the heat of the fire one disk rotor has cracked and needs replacing!

Within the time left this will not be an easy job as the rotors are OKA specific and only available from OKA in Australia.

Poor Ruedi is close to a nervous breakdown.

We have the choice of Susi flying business class to Australia so she can bring back 2 rotors in the 40 kg of passenger luggage .... or find somebody that builds them locally! Luckily the company that refurbished our brake callipers has a contact to a good workshop and we are able to have 2 disk rotors made in Switzerland.

In the meantime the schedule of the Grimaldi has shifted so much that we can change our departure harbour back to Hamburg and still have plenty of time to get there .... We even get the ticket.

We will sail approx. on December 5th with the "Grande Nigeria".

On Wednesday, November 18th, Susi can fetch the new disk rotors.

They were manufactured from scratch in just a bit over 1 week.

Amazing! Thanks to all for the job done!

Ruedi is able to mount all outside the building on Thursday ..... just before winter hits Europe on Friday .....

The bleeding of the breaks just does not work ..... it is just never ending stress ..... no fun at all ....

But we still have one week to get all fixed .....

On Tuesday and Wednesday Tobl and Ruedi work feverishly on the breaks. The fittings are no good anymore and need replacing. Susi drives to Zürich to fetch new ones.

Then all is ok, breaks work, test drive is completed, all is well.

Uff .....

The Grimaldi schedule on the internet gets updated more or less every 2 weeks.

Susi realizes that the schedule given to us does not match the position of the ship on the internet. The ship will be delayed by at least another 2 days.

This is good news as the crew at Alu-Star wants to paint our bull bar yellow.

To reduce weight holes were cut into it and the bull bar looks a bit like Swiss cheese ..... so they want it to not only have wholes like a cheese but also the correct colour!

On Wednesday, December 1st, Susi checks the location of the ship on the marine traffic webpage and calculates that schedule of Grimaldi is at least 5 days off.

She calls the agent and asks them to please enquire.

According to Grimaldi the new departure date in Hamburg is now December 7th, 10 AM.

On Saturday, December 5th, 2015, Susi has one last hectic internet session.

Destination	ETA	ETD
Hamburg	07 Dec 10:00	07 Dec 10:00
Tilbury	08 Dec 10:00	08 Dec 10:00
Antwerp	10 Dec 10:00	10 Dec 10:00
Dakar	13 Dec 10:00	13 Dec 10:00
Conakry	15 Dec 10:00	15 Dec 10:00
Freetown	17 Dec 10:00	17 Dec 10:00
Vitoria	20 Dec 10:00	20 Dec 10:00
Rio de Janeiro	23 Dec 10:00	23 Dec 10:00
Santos	25 Dec 10:00	25 Dec 10:00
Paranaguá	28 Dec 10:00	28 Dec 10:00
Zárate	31 Dec 10:00	31 Dec 10:00
Montevideo	02 Jan 10:00	02 Jan 10:00

There she sees that the Grimaldi schedule had been updated again showing that the Grande Nigeria is only due in Hamburg on December 8th, another day later than the time given to us by our agent.

We send an Email to the Grimaldi agent in Hamburg informing him, that we are now on the way north and he should please send us an SMS should anything change.

We leave AluStar in **Murg** and have a pleasant drive north ... not much traffic ..... until we reach the area around **Karlsruhe** .... what a traffic jam!

As we have plenty of time we decide to call it the day and find ourselves a good spot for the night.

On Sunday morning we stop at an Autobahn restaurant to check our email on the internet.

As there is no email from the agent and we have not received an SMS either we continue on north without any hurry.

Around **Hannover** the traffic is very heavy and only moves extremely slowly.

As it already gets dark shortly after 4 PM we decide to leave the traffic jam and have a quiet evening.

On Monday morning, December 7th, we head to McDonalds to check for emails.

As Susi checks the marine traffic web page to see the location of the ship with horror she sees that it has already reached Hamburg .... actually already the evening before .....

So the Grimaldi schedule was off again, but for us in the wrong direction!!!!

Quickly we get into the OKA.

We are still some 90 km away from the harbour and it is already 8 AM!

Ruedi pushes it a bit and the good OKA drives north on the highway with 110 km/h.

There is plenty of traffic but it moves fast.

Then we reach the crosses.

The traffic is very heavy and slow.

At the A7 cross of the A1 the routing of the GPS sends us onto the wrong highway.  
We have to turn and queue up again ..... slow moving traffic ..... the minutes go by fast .....

Susi calls the agent to find out, if 10 AM still is the time where we are supposed to be in the harbour ..... yes it is .....  
At 10 AM we are still some 10 km away from the harbour.  
Nothing moves on the highway, emergency vehicles drive past .....  
We call the agent again and inform him, that we are stuck in the traffic jam.  
He is already aware of it and says that we still have time.

We have the GPS-track from the last time where we had embarked on the Grande Costa d'Avorio in 2013.  
According to that track we should use the road # 253 to reach the harbour.  
The traffic drags past the # 255 exit and slowly, slowly we get close to the exit to the # 253.  
We see a sign that the next exit is closed due to construction work.

No!!!  
What now???  
We turn around and queue up on the highway again in opposite direction.  
The traffic moves one car at the time .... then the next one .....

From the bridge we see that there is not much movement ..... we call the agent again and tell him, that we are close ... but stuck .....  
Our nerves are just flying!  
We are just a few hundred meters away from the ship and still so far away from it!!!  
Shortly after 11 AM we make it to the O'Swaldquai and get the formalities done.  
Now we are in the harbour area, we have reached the ship .....

Note:  
Due to the wish of one passenger for privacy on the Internet we have deleted all passenger names in this journey.

We get on board, are shown to the cabin and then it is lunch time.  
There are 3 more parties on board:  
- a German couple with a Sprinter (2WD) on an open-end trip .....  
- a German couple with a Bremach (4WD) with 9 months' time ....  
- a German-Paraguayan family with their 6 years old son with a huge Winnebago and a Renault Kangoo (both 2WD) immigrating to Paraguay .....

After lunch we hurry back to the OKA.  
We have not packed yet, nothing is ready.  
We had thought that we have all the time in the world ..... now it is rush, rush!!!!  
By 4 PM we have most of our gear ready .... PC, guitar, clothes, books, shoes, etc. etc.  
But Ruedi is still removing things from the driver cab, turning the power off, adding the security features to the windows .... and already we are asked to drive onto the ship!!!

We are shown to deck 6.  
There we finish all the work and finally can go to our cabin and get organised.  
Already it is 6 PM, dinner time!  
What a day - actually one of the worst we ever had!  
Not really what we had expected as the beginning of our trip!

During dinner the **Grande Nigeria** sets sail .....  
Even though it is dark and foggy some of us stand outside and watch Hamburg glide past.  
What a shame that it is dark; it is such a nice trip down the Elbe  
Then the feet get cold and soon we are in bed.

On Tuesday morning there is not much to be seen outside the window .... it is a grey, rainy day .....

At 9 AM we have the "familiarisation" meeting ..... information from eating times to how to use the life vest to when the Malaria prophylaxis is given ....



The steward demonstrates the usage of the survival suit.  
Let's hope that we will never have to use it .....

At 1 PM we have to turn our clocks back by one hour.  
In the afternoon we show our South America 2013 movie to some of the other passengers.

The cook is not as good as the ones we have had on previous trips.  
But he and the steward will finish their tour in Tilbury and Antwerp.  
Let's see how the new ones are .....



During the night we sail up the river Thames and reach **Tilbury**, the port of London.  
This time the ship does not go through the lock and docks at the old cruise terminal where the cars will be unloaded / loaded.  
The Grimaldi Grande Abidjan glides past us down the Thames .....

On Wednesday morning a blue sky and sunshine greets us.  
Some of the passengers go into the city.  
We decide to stay on board and start working.  
Plenty of paperwork has just been left "to be processed on board of the ship" .....



During the night the ship has to shift some 1.6 miles up the river into the container harbour where it will unload / load its container.

On Thursday morning the day is grey and windy.  
The new steward Luigi starts his "tour of duty".  
It is the first time he does it ....  
We try to help him where we can.  
We ladies decide to clean the toilet ourselves ..... looking at Luigi's "experience" it will be cleaner this way .....



At lunch it is antipasto time again.

Thursdays and Sundays are special days with regard to food .... and according to the menu plan Saturday nights are Pizza nights again!  
We will see .....

Shortly before 3 PM the pilot comes on board and shortly after we set sail.

We gather at the top deck and watch as the ship is pulled away by tugs.  
Then the first officer arrives and tells us that we are not allowed on this deck as it is a cargo area.  
We all complain as it makes no sense to not allow us to be up here.  
There is no cargo on the deck!  
But he insists and frustrated we go down to the accommodation deck.  
The view is not good from here and we are all not happy with this set-up.  
We will have to talk to the captain ... this is no fun .....



At the old passenger terminal a cruise liner has taken the spot we had the day before.

A strong and cold wind makes staying outside quite unpleasant so we go inside.  
July is definitely the better time to make this trip .....

During dinner the Grande Nigeria leaves the protected waters of the coast and starts rolling a bit.  
It does not bother us at all but the mother of the child does not like it all ....

Friday is a windy and wet day.

At breakfast we see that the table where the 4 Germans sit is not set ... or let's say: looks as if they already have had their breakfast .....

The clock in the dining room shows 7:30 AM so we are on time ...

The boy comes running down the hallway followed by his parents and they look a bit puzzled too.

Then our steward Luigi comes and has a wide grin on his face ... you forgot to change time, he?

Time change?

Nobody told us and there was no message on the intercom ... and the clock is wrong then too!!!

Sorry, sorry ... we are back on Central European time and will stay on it until we leave Africa.

Well, that explains the empty table.

For a long time the ship waits in the English Channel for the pilot to arrive.

We hope that he comes by helicopter again.

Shortly before lunch he arrives ... by boat .....and slowly the Grande Nigeria starts making its way towards Antwerp.

We try several times to go outside but with the rain and the wind we turn around almost instantly.

At dinner time we enter the lock that controls the water level in the harbour.

As it is low tide it takes almost one hour until the ship has reached the right level and can leave the lock.

The ship reaches its berth in the **Antwerp** harbour and is tied down.

We will only set sail again tomorrow shortly before midnight.

The loading of vehicles starts soon and goes on the whole night.

Every so often loud rumbling can be heard when they load extremely heavy equipment or push one of the platforms in, where they transport containers on.

On Saturday morning shortly after 6 AM it gets noisy.

We can hear material being dumped on the car deck above us.

It looks like they will be filling the top deck as well.

Already we can hear the squeaking of the tires of the first arriving cars.

The drivers in Antwerp have a very bad reputation of being fast and ruthless drivers ....

The Grande Abidjan is pushed into the harbour and takes position right behind the Grande Nigeria.

We seem to have a similar route at the moment.

As we come for breakfast there is no bread.

The cook has changed and the new one is not yet organised .... biscuits will have to do for the moment .....

As the internet is lousy in the harbour Susi decide to take the computer and to go into town.



Out of curiosity she checks the Grimaldi schedule again:

Grande Nigeria		
	ETA	ETD
Hamburg	10 Dec	01 Dec
Antwerp	09 Dec	01 Dec
Algeria	08 Dec	10 Dec
Barcelona	13 Dec	12 Dec
Algeria	16 Dec	15 Dec
Hamburg	20 Dec	18 Dec
Antwerp	17 Dec	18 Dec
Barcelona	21 Dec	18 Dec
Algeria	20 Dec	19 Dec
Hamburg	23 Dec	20 Dec
Algeria	22 Dec	21 Dec
Barcelona	25 Dec	21 Dec
Hamburg	28 Dec	22 Dec
Algeria	27 Dec	23 Dec
Barcelona	30 Dec	23 Dec

At least the departure date in Hamburg is correct now.

So we are expected to be in Montevideo on January 11th.

When she comes back in the afternoon she hears that 3 more passengers have arrived:

- an Argentinian with his Fiat 500 (2WD) returning to Argentina
- a French-Spanish couple with their Renault truck (4WD) on a world trip.

At dinner time there is fresh bread .... but Italian style ..... without salt .....

The boy is frustrated.

He is a very, very fussy eater and so far bread had been his salvation.

But bread without salt?

Nope!

He rather stays hungry .... even if his mama puts salt on the bread .....

There is not wine for dinner either.

(Usually there is one small bottle of wine per person for lunch and dinner)

Luigi tells us that in port the cabinet is locked and he cannot access the wine.

Due to customs rules they are not allowed to access their alcohol storage when the ship is not berthed.

We are supposed to set sail around 11 PM .....



On Sunday morning we wake up to a foggy and rainy day .... and are still in Antwerp!

All the EUCOR car transporters that were opposite of us have left but only one new ship has arrived.  
The port seems to be deserted no flashing lights, no cars moving .... nothing!  
We wonder if they are on strike ....?

At breakfast we receive the information that we should set sail at 11 AM.  
Ok ....

Lunch comes and goes and nothing moves.

Dinner comes and we are still in port.  
The captain tells us that there seems to be a problem with the locks.  
When requesting a slot for the Grande Nigeria they keep getting the same message: No capacity at the moment, call back in another hour ....



On Monday morning we wake up .....and are still in Antwerp!!!  
Apparently they have problems with the pilots.  
And without pilots nothing moves in the harbour ....

Strangely enough 2 more Grimaldi vessels, the Grande Roma and the Grande Ellade, have arrived making it 4 Grimaldi vessels in the port.  
To us it looks a bit more as if Grimaldi is being boycotted ....

At lunch time we receive wine and are informed that we will sail shortly.  
Just a few minutes later we can feel the vibrations generated by the engines increase.  
The crane in front of the window "moves".  
We all cheer and clap hands .... until one passenger says:  
It is the crane moving not the ship! Check the spotlights behind on the dock, they stand still!  
????

But then we realise that the ship is being pushed away from the dock.  
Yes, we are moving!!!

Suddenly a loud alarm bell goes off .... that means fire!  
We all stop and wait ....  
The bell goes on and on ... no message on the intercom ...  
What is happening?  
Then the alarm stops and the intercom starts with a crackling sound ....  
"Attention, attention!  
This is a false alarm!  
No action required.  
I repeat:  
Attention, attention!  
This is a false alarm!  
No action required."

We are all relieved.  
Then we hear the cause of the alarm: the cook has forgotten to start the ventilation in the kitchen!  
The smoke from the grill has started the fire alarm!



Quickly we finish lunch and head outside.  
Even though the sun is shining it is cold outside.  
So when we have reached the lock just the ones that are on the ship for the first time stay outside to watch.



In the afternoon the two cadets set up the Christmas tree in the salon - decorated with little, colourful, flashing LED-lights ....  
The 6 year old is delighted ....

In the late afternoon we reach the English Channel and the Grande Nigeria stops for a few minutes .... the pilot goes from board ..... we are finally on the way to Africa!!!

During the night the ship starts pitching a bit.  
We don't mind it .... it is kind of calming ...

On Tuesday morning it stays dark when we gather for breakfast at 7:30 AM.  
Even though we are out in the ocean the ship's time is still in Central European time.

Today Marcello the new cook has made doughnuts for breakfast .... they are still a bit warm .... yummy!  
The good food will again result in many visits to the gym ....

At lunch we have the first "victim" to the pitching ship:  
The boy's mama gets pale and decides to go back to the cabin and lay down ....

In the afternoon we get together in the salon with some of the other passengers to tell them about the places we have been in Argentina and Chile.  
On the way back to the cabins the captain stops us and invites us to the bridge.  
We have a little chat up there and hear that is it his first trip as captain, he has just received his "ticket" on the 11th of December.  
He is a nice chap quite young and very likable .... quite the opposite of the 1st officer or chief mate ....  
He also tells us that during the day we can visit the bridge any time.  
He also tells us that after Freetown once the cars have been removed from the top deck we can be up there and we will even have deck chairs so we can enjoy the views and the sun.  
This is really good news and we all thank him.

At dinner time the boy's mama joins us but she looks very pale.  
Her husband comes a bit later and brings her some sea-sickness tablets.  
The chief mate who also acts as medical contact comes and brings her biscuits and some lemon.  
He even smiles a bit ....

During the night the pitching increases.  
We have entered the **Golf of Biscay** .....

Every so often after an especially strong pitch we can hear things falling down.  
Our drawers keep opening and closing so we block them with a chair.  
Ruedi cannot sleep. Even he is not afraid he is on full alert .... Susi sleeps like a baby ....

On Wednesday, December 16, all except the boy's mama are present for breakfast and don't seem to be bothered much by the pitching of the ship.

We are still in the Golf of Biscay.  
During the morning we meet each other at the bridge where we watch the ship moving over the swell.  
The officer on duty estimates it to be around 5 - 6 m.  
According to the weather forecast we will have similar condition for another 24 hours.

At lunch the appetite is not quite as usual ....  
In the evening the boy's mama joins us again at the table.

After dinner the captain informs us that EU citizens don't require a visa for Dakar, but we (Swiss) and the boy's mama (Paraguay) will require one.  
The agent in Dakar will arrange for the visas.  
The captain also tells us that he is trying to arrange that we can have either a city tour or a visit to the island outside Dakar, where the French used to keep the slaves before shipping them to the Americas.

During the night the clocks are set back by one hour.  
On Thursday morning the sea has calmed a fair bit.  
We don't mind at all!



At lunch we find a menu on the table.  
The cadet has been active ..... and it is Antipasto day again!



In the afternoon Susi decorates the cabin with a "Christmas tree" ..... hmmm ... well, better than nothing ....  
On Friday we wake up to blue skies.

New deck chairs have been placed outside by the crew and we enjoy them.  
We start getting a real "cruise feeling" with the good food, sport, reading ....  
On Saturday the captain informs us that all berths in Dakar are busy and the ship will be delayed.  
Therefore he has cancelled our trip to the island.  
Currently he expects us to arrive in the evening.  
That would be a shame.  
Dakar is an interesting harbour to sail into.  
Well, we will see .... we are not there yet ....

Sunday goes past .... blue skies, deck chairs, good food ....  
Life can be soooo hard sometimes .....

On Monday, December 21, we see land!  
We have reached Dakar.

After breakfast all passengers and some crew sit outside and have a look at the skyline of **Dakar** (Senegal).



The weather is very pleasant .... not too hot not too cold ....  
Some small fishing boats bob up and down on the water .... some "floating coffin" too .....

We are informed that, as it looks now, we will only be able to berth tomorrow at 6 PM.  
The Grande Nigeria finds its waiting position and casts anchor.

The ship is guarded on all sides.  
Especially the area of the ramp is critical.



They have a puppet standing there to simulate a crew member.  
And they also have crew on watch and fire houses installed so they can house down any person that wants to climb on board.



The Grimaldi Grande America lies just beside our ship.  
She is almost empty, has just 14 containers left on board before she goes for repairs.  
She will go into Dakar before our ship which means that we will have to wait.

We don't mind as there is always plenty to be done.  
Again we sit with other passengers and exchange travelling information about South America.  
At dusk the Grande America sails into Dakar.

On Tuesday nothing moves .... the ship stays in the waiting position.  
Luckily the weather is fine and the passengers can enjoy the new deck chairs.  
But there are some nasty wasp-like insects that attack and sting without warning.

In the evening the Grande America leaves Dakar.  
We hear that the port in Dakar is so full of cars and containers that the Grande Nigeria will have problems unloading its goods and will have to wait a bit longer.



On Wednesday during breakfast the ship starts moving and we sail into Dakar.



There is really not much room left.



A large convoy of UN vehicles blocks large areas of the harbour.



Their destination is Central Africa .....



The ropes are picked up and delivered to the shore.



Some people are already waiting for the ship.



It is always interesting to see what kind of things are waiting in the harbour. And it is amazing how the vehicles are "optimized" to their full "transport capacity" ....



We even see a car from Switzerland!



The pier has seen better days too .....



The local hikers get organised and start getting vehicles ready .... and the jump starting leads too!



The ramp is lowered and the officials come on board.

At 10 AM the ship is cleared and the first passengers go ashore.  
We have already been in Dakar twice with the Grimaldi but have never left the ship.  
This time we decide to go and leave after lunch.

We are in search of a toy for the boy and Internet.

As we don't have a feeling for the city and its inhabitants yet we decide to just take "light equipment" with us, no large cameras, no computers, just the mobile phones.



The harbour is chaotic but everybody is very helpful.  
Luckily they all speak French.  
As Senegal used to be a French colony until 1960 French is the main language.

We find an ATM and a coffee shop with free internet (after consumption ....) at the service station right outside the main exit gate.  
We will return later on with the computers.

As we are not successful with our search for toys we continue on towards a large building that could be a shopping centre.



We come past the train station.

There are still some trains in the station, but no more rails. We ask a local guy if the station is still operating. He means yes, but the trains just leave a bit further out .... actually 1.6 km further out .....

At the station we ask a lady where we can find toys and are pointed into town .... but we should ask again a bit further up the road ....



On the way we come past a Victor Inox shop.  
Victor Inox is famous for their Swiss Army knives and the really good kitchen knives.  
They seem to have found another market ... machetes, etc. ....



Finally we reach a large square and it does not take long and a man offers us his assistance.  
Even though Susi makes it clear to him that we don't require a guide he insists that he will help us.  
As we don't mind a bit of help we agree to go with him. Soon a second man joins us and together they make sure we are left alone and no other people try to sell us things or offer to guide us.

The men ask us if we want to see local stuff or imported ... of course local!



So we are guided into the small streets of Dakar.  
Everywhere people are offering things, trading is going on, there is plenty to see.



Then we reach a factory and are shown around.  
It must have been a normal block with flats .... now each room is full of sewing machines and people, mainly men and sadly also boys sit there and produce clothes.

We are not interested in clothes and at the end decide to get a drum for the boy on the ship.  
When asking for the price we are told 90 000 Central African Francs which roughly equals 90 US\$ ... which definitely is far too much ....

But we know that we have to bargain, the question is just, how much should we offer?  
As we only have 10 000 Central African Francs with us we have it easy to argue with the sails person.

It is either take it or leave it ....

Our offer must be at the limit of the profit as only when our "guide" argues with the sails person we get the drum for that price.

We head back towards the harbour.

Then the second of our "guides" wants to sell us his good.

But he only has a few wooden animals .... which we don't want ..... and some small puppet-like hangers .... for which he wants too much .....

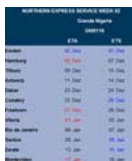
So we give him 5 000 Central African Francs for the guidance and tell him he will have to share this with the first guide.

They are both not really happy about it but we did not ask for their service .... so take it or leave it ....

Back at the ship we get the PC and head to the coffee shop "La Croissanterie" for some Internet time.



"Santa Claus" is standing in front of the shop, handing out soft toffies.  
What a shame that we have such a good cook in the ship.  
Some nice baguette sandwiches, cakes, muffins, sweets and other goodies look very appealing.  
So should you visit Dakar and have a bad cook .... this could be a good place for you ...  
Susi checks the Grimaldi schedule on the web.



Line	ETA	ETD
Hamburg	08.00	09.00
Rio de Janeiro	12.00	13.00
Montevideo	16.00	17.00
Hamburg	20.00	21.00
Rio de Janeiro	24.00	25.00
Montevideo	28.00	29.00
Hamburg	32.00	33.00
Rio de Janeiro	36.00	37.00
Montevideo	40.00	41.00
Hamburg	44.00	45.00
Rio de Janeiro	48.00	49.00
Montevideo	52.00	53.00

The ports have not been changed.  
But the arrival in Montevideo has shifted by another few days to the 17th.  
Well, we will see.  
We know from previous trips that sailing schedules have a tendency of changing frequently.  
We just hope that they leave Rio and Zarate on the plan .....

As we leave we spend our change on a can of soft-drink ..... for "Santa Claus"!  
Merry Christmas!  
Thursday is the 24th ..... today we celebrate Christmas in Germany and in Switzerland .....

Susi brings some German Christmas Strudel for breakfast ... at least a little bit of Christmas feeling .....

Later on Susi and our neighbours Wolfgang and Ulrike sit together and have a look at all the goodies they and we have for Christmas and what we want to do with them.  
At lunch we have the usual "Thursday meal" with antipasto followed by pasta, fish, meat and salad.  
In the evening after dinner mixed nuts are served and we start cracking the nutshells.  
Then some Panettone is served!  
So also for the crew a bit of Christmas has to be, even though we will only celebrate it later on.  
We are informed that we will arrive on Conakry (Guinea) on Saturday.  
Friday, 25th, we are at sea.  
The plan of guarding our vehicles while in the African harbours is rediscussed.  
The captain has decided that from midnight to 6 AM the ramps to deck 6 are closed and therefore we are not required to be there to watch our vehicles.  
A member of team 3 argues that this does not make sense.  
He had been an officer in the French army and says that there is no way that they can make certain that nobody gets himself locked in during that time and then has plenty of time to break in to our cars to steal things and place them in other vehicles that will later on be unloaded.  
Nobody will see that until it is too late.  
We all agree to his point and agree that our watch has to be for the full time of the stay in the harbour.  
The question now is should we discuss this with the captain or not?  
As we don't want to risk that the captain explicitly forbids us to be on watch while the ramp is up we decide to stick to the approved watch plan and changed teams every 3 hours, no matter if the ramp is up or down.

As a sidenote:  
Our OKA is that save that we would not have to watch it.  
It is nearly impossible to brake in within the time and with the tools the locals have.  
We just help the guys to protect their property.  
So they have to decide when they want to guard the cars.  
Luigi comes around and informs us that there will be an aperitif before lunch and lunch will be later.



Susi and Ulrike quickly decorate the tables and get the cookies and chocolate ready.  
The menu sounds promising .....



All crew that are not on shift and the passengers gather in the salon and we celebrate Christmas with a bit of singing, a fruit punch and finger-food.  
Then we go for lunch.  
Marcello the cook has outdone himself!



For starters a seafood platter followed by Roast beef.



Main courses are Lasagne al Pesto, then grilled Salmon with vegetables followed by a veal roast and potatoes.



For dessert Panettone is served and our platters with Swiss Christmas cookies, German Lebkuchen and chocolate.  
All of us with no exception are unable to eat all the courses and nevertheless still eat too much .....

so siesta is a "must" for most of us.  
In the evening nobody is really hungry .....

We are informed that we will arrive in Conakry early in the morning.





As we are the first group to watch the vehicles we both don't sleep to well.

Every so often we check the position of the ship on the GPS and how much longer it will be until we reach **Conakry** (Ghana).

On Saturday around 7 AM the pilot comes on board and slowly the ship starts entering the port.  
After breakfast we all gather outside and watch.



Long boats transport people from and to the islands .....



We are a bit surprised to see the rubbish that floats around.

The modern world has reached this part of Africa and with it the Styrofoam cups, fast food dishes, cans .....



The port itself makes a better impression than Dakar did, tidy and seemingly organised.

The city surrounds the port.

But we are not allowed to go ashore .... too many unknown factors like Ebola, etc. ....



Shelters for the guards can be seen everywhere.

But somehow we don't get the impression that the place is dangerous.

Still, no shore leave.



Officials and some local labourers are waiting for the ship to berth.



When the ropes are being taken ashore we get ready for the first vehicle watch:

proper shoes, safety vest, water, torch (just in case ... should the power fail we don't want to be caught in the dark ....), the walky-talky that we had received from the officers, a book to read ..... and a list of stuff that we want to get from the OKA ....

We call the cargo office but nobody answers.

So we just take the elevator and head down to deck 6.

We are a bit surprised that the door is open but it seems that they not have increased the security level yet.

It is quite tricky to walk to the our vehicles as the cargo area is crammed with vehicles and most of them are parked so close to each other that one has to find a way to get through.

We find all to be in order, all locks are locked and nothing has been pinched.

As all our vehicles are parked together it makes guarding easy, one at each end of the group.

Time goes past and activity starts.

The ventilation is started and fresh air pumped into the cargo hull.

This is nice as it is close to 30° and quite sticky.

This way the exhaust fumes will also not bother us too much.

It is quite noisy and every so often loud bangs scare us a bit.

The voices come closer and vehicles are driven off the ship.

But our deck remains calm.

Shortly before 12 we gather our things and head to the elevator.

Team 2 arrives to take over the watch and we head up to have lunch.

At 3 PM the next change in shift is due.

Around quarter past three somebody knocks on our door.

We are called into a meeting at the salon.

Team 3 is not able to go down and relieve the current watch.

Apparently the crew has received instructions that nobody is allowed on deck 6.

Great!

And what about team 2 that is down there at the moment?

A big discussion starts what we should do now.

Shortly after team 2 shows up.

As nobody had come to relieve them they had figured out that something had gone wrong and found their way down the ramp to deck 3 and from there the crew had opened the door to let them upstairs again.

Apparently the loading ramp to deck 6 was now closed and the instructions had been given that nobody is allowed to open the doors to deck 6. Team 2 had agreed with the crew that should the ramp be lowered again they would advise us so we could continue to guard our vehicles.

Team 2 also tells us that the last half hour of their watch there had been plenty of local staff checking vehicles and numbers on deck 6.

So if they had the intention pinch some stuff they could easily have left somebody there .....

As this is exactly what we don't want team 4 heads to the bridge and comes back with one of the cadets to let the team 3 down to deck 6.

They head down but it but are back in no time.

The chief mate insists that nobody is allowed on deck 6 while the ramp is up.

The cadet explains that as the captain is asleep the chief mate is in charge and there is nothing we can do until the captain is up again.

But he also says that once the captain is up we should discuss it with him and get this all cleared once and for all.

Around 4 PM Susi wants to deliver some stuff to our neighbours Wolfgang and Ulrike (team 2) and hears a phone ringing in their cabin.

As this could well be the crew advising that the ramp had been lowered again she goes to get them.

On the way back they are already being searched by a crew member.

Yes, the ramp has been lowered again, we can continue with the watch.

This is good news as it means that the crew really has instructions to inform us.

But on the other had it also gives us arguing power that no matter if the ramp is up or not, in port we should be allowed to have our watch.

These changes on short notice will not work during the night.

We'd rather be there and the ramp is up than the other way round.

So once the captain is up we will really need a short meeting with him to get this clarified.

Now team 3 has to get ready quickly.

But one of them cannot be found.

The passengers of team 4 are also not around.

So we decide that only one of the team 3 goes down.

When we call the crew to send somebody to open deck 6 we are informed that the watch is already there.

Ok, it looks like the team 4 has decided to do this shift.

Well, this will screw up the whole plan but it is not our problem.

Later on we hear that a team member from team 4 had gone to see the captain and discussed the issue.

The chief mate had also been there and the captain had given him the order to allow us to watch our vehicles.

Also when the chief mate had gone down to deck 6, even though there was not supposed to be any work done on deck 6 there had been plenty of locals leaning on the vehicles and waiting ... the chief mate had not said one word .....

With all these locals on deck 6 (that don't really should be there in the first place!!!) and only 2 members per watch team it will be a challenge to guard the vehicles.

So for now it seems that the fronts have been cleared .... we will see for how long .....

One shift follows the other one, team after team.

We are due again at 9 PM.



We are surprised about the amount of vehicles that have already been driven away.

It is really interesting to see what goes on.

The drivers have no respect for the property of somebody else.

The vehicles are driven out of the ship no matter if the tyre has air or is flat.

At one time we hear screeching coming down deck after deck.

Then the car reaches us.

We see that the hooks of the fixation ropes are still in the wheel and are jammed into the brake callipers thus making it impossible for the tyre to turn!

The driver does not really care.

He drives the car at full speed dragging the blocked tyre over the floor and leaving black marks of rubber ....probably by now melted rubber ....

At one time one truck has to be moved.

The driver of the truck does not have much experience and turns to early badly damaging the side of the truck standing beside it.



Also stealing seems to be normal .... nobody even looks around when a driver opens a door of a car and takes something out of it .....

And there is enough stuff around to be pinched!

The majority of the cars to be delivered to Conakry and Freetown are full of equipment, from mattresses to bicycles to old electronic equipment .....

Shortly before midnight an officer arrives and lets us know that they will close the ramp to our deck.

It will be reopened tomorrow around 7 AM.

We have the choice of leaving now or staying and being locked in until tomorrow.

This comes as a surprise to us and we don't really know how to react.

We don't really feel like staying down here for the rest of the night .....

While Susi stay to guard the vehicles Ruedi heads up to the passengers to ask them what we should do.

But before they can decide the crew members come down the ramp and Susi decides to go with them.

The release team has just arrived and we discuss with them what we should do.

Well, actually there is nothing we can do ..... we are out and the ramp is up.

Nobody can now go in or out until tomorrow ... which is not too bad, as long as there is nobody hiding in deck 6 and as long as we can go back in before they open again.

This way we can check that all is still ok.

Should there have been a break in, the responsible person would still be either on deck 6 or 7 and we would find him.

Tired we make our way to the elevator on deck 3.

A crew member unlocks the locks and lets us in to the elevator.

Behind us the heavy steel door is shut and the gate locked again.

We head up and inform the other teams that there will be no watch until 6 AM.

After a nice hot shower we sink into bed .....

On Sunday morning when we get up team 4 is already down on watch.



There is a lot of activity outside and vehicles and cargo is unloaded.

Shortly before 9 AM we go down to deck 3 and the crew member unlocks the gate for us.



At least 20 men are waiting to be let upstairs to drive cars out.  
Quickly we take our positions.  
Shortly after the group walks past us and up to deck 7.



Soon cars are moved down again.  
Some of them cannot be jumpstarted anymore.  
Some are pushed out by men and some are pushed out by a Bobcat with rubber covered bumper bar.  
Sometimes even one car pushes the other one .... no matter if damage is caused or not .....  
And damage is done ..... broken lights, ripped off bumpers, smashed trunks and doors ... you name it!  
Around noon we are released and head up for lunch.  
Every team has stories to tell.

After lunch we need a good sleep.  
Too soon it is time again to go down and release the team on watch.  
Around 10 PM the unloading is finished of cars for Conakry is finished.  
We can stop the watch until we reach Freetown.

We head up and inform the teams that we can all go for a good night's sleep.  
Nobody minds ....

Around 11 PM the engine is started and the ship starts vibrating.  
A tug comes and pulls the back of the ship away from the wall.  
As soon as there is enough space so the thrusters can work and the ship starts pushing itself away.  
The tug changes sides and helps push the ship around until it has completed a 180° turn and is now free to leave the port.

The pilot boat comes along side and together they leave the harbour.  
Once in the safe waters the pilot leaves the ship and we head south ....

On Monday morning when we wake up we have already reached **Freetown** (Sierra Leone) and are waiting for the pilot.  
Even though the pilot was promised for 8 AM he only arrives around 10 PM .... no rush .....



All passengers are on deck and watch the entry.  
One of them was here in 2005 and is surprised that there are no more marks of the civil war to be seen.



There are mosques everywhere .... well, it is an Islamic state after all .....



Even in the middle of the shanty towns there is a small mosque!  
Even if the poor have no money, they will always find some for the church .....



We also watch their "building style".  
Everything is used to build additional rooms and floors  
In one instance with each additional floor the house gets wider and wider!!!



The shanty towns are built right at the edge of the ocean.  
As there is no more land to build on they build on stilts.  
At high tide the waves splash against the walls of some of the houses .....



The toilets are pit latrine into the ocean ..... and next to them the children are playing, people are fishing ..... no worries .....



Long boats are in use for transport and fishing .....



..... and little dug-out canoes ..... we would not dare to go fishing in it!



We reach the harbour and see the usual guards.  
But they all wear uniforms and safety vest.



It is always interesting to see the crews that are waiting for the ship to berth so they can start their jobs ..... even though sometime we wonder what their jobs are .....



A container has been converted to a shelter.



The tying up of the ropes is a bit special too!  
4 people pull on the rope and one watches .....



We can watch the activities in the close by houses.  
The village well is the local laundry place .....



A reminder of past times .....

Today we will have different people in the guard teams.  
The two passengers that have their vehicles closest to the truck that need moving will go down first.  
After yesterday's experience they don't want to run the risk of their vehicles being damaged by incompetent drivers.  
They leave .... and a few minutes later are back ... furious and frustrated ....  
The chief mate does not allow them to have access to the vehicles!  
He will inform us when the door to deck 6 is opened so we can start the watch.  
What now?  
What if he "forgets" to inform us?  
The door to the captain's door is closed which indicates that he is asleep.  
During this time the chief mate is in charge of the ship and there is nothing we can do.

Then the local authorities come on board ..... 5 of them ....

Suddenly one of the officers rushes to the kitchen and returns with 4 slabs of soft drinks followed by Marcello the cook with another slab ..... "presents" for the local authorities .....

Then we hear the captain's voice .... furious and very loud: " .... you already got enough presents! ...."

The captain is awake!

This is our chance!

Discretely we queue up near the mess room where the captain is arguing with the local authorities.

He sees asks if we are waiting for shore passes .....

No, we don't get access to the vehicles .....

Not again!

The captain grabs the phone and tells the chief mate to let us do our watch.

Quickly the team goes down ..... but is back in just a few minutes!

What is going on now?????

The chief mate did not give them access to deck 6!

He will call one of the passengers or send somebody up to fetch us when the gate is opened.

We all agree that we will have to wait and we are all sure that the chief mate will actually inform us in time as he cannot risk another blow with the captain.

Around 3 PM a crew member shows up and takes the watch down.



We go outside to watch the unloading.

A lot of empty freezer containers are loaded.

The little "arms" pull the holding mechanism onto the container and then it is clicked in.

Then the container is checked by a crew member to make sure that there is nobody inside the container.

Then the doors are sealed.

Only then the container is loaded onto the ship.

We are the next guard team and due to go down at 6 PM.

The released team tells us that the truck had been removed carefully and all is well.

So that problem is solved.



But now the vehicles are pretty exposed; no more trucks block view and access to them.

They tell us that they had seen a local driver sneak up to the vehicles and when he realised that there was a watch had run away ..... so we are right in protecting our vehicles!

Every so often a car is driven down.

The supervisor car keeps going up the ramp with loud beeping as it goes against the traffic.

Some of the locals are really shameless.

One car is driven down the ramp followed by the supervisor car.

On the ramp they stop, the back of the car in front is opened, some goods in it unloaded into the supervisor car and then they continue on down the ramp.

They don't care that Ruedi is watching them ..... unreal!

Around 8 PM a crew member comes and informs us that they have finished unloading vehicles from the decks above deck 6.

They have searched the decks to make sure that no locals are hiding in them.

Once we are out they will now close the gate and search all again.

They will leave on the elevators and the gate will only be opened again in South Amerika.

So even though they will continue unloading goods for us this means that we can stop watching deck 6.

We head down the ramp to deck 3 and find the captain talking to the chief mate.

We thank the chief mate for getting us for the watch.

The captain comes with us and tells us that Conakry and Freetown are really difficult harbours ..... trouble starts with the pilot coming on board and only stops once the pilot is gone again ....

On deck 12 we inform all passengers that the watch is finished and we can now relax.

None of us minds ... we are all very tired.

On Tuesday morning, December 29th, we are still in Freetown.

Not much is happening but there is still Grimaldi material and goods on the pier.



A truck fills the sky with thick smoke.

Well, face it: the world is just exporting its pollutions problems to Africa by shipping old vehicles to these ports!

On the other hand for the people in Africa the vehicles we would scrap are still worth a lot as they replace their donkey and horse-drawn buggies!

After a while still nothing happens ..... no drivers appear.

We see a pretty angry chief mate hop into the vehicles and drive them into the ship himself.



Then the ramp is lifted and the pilot comes on board.

Only 2 people are present to detach the ropes ... nobody is there for the front rope ....

The two people in the back detach their ropes and start walking toward the exit near front of the ship.

As there is no tug present the ship uses its thrusters to push itself into the open water.

The ship will have to make a 180° turn to get out of the harbour.

More and more the ship moves away from the wall ..... the front rope is still not detached .... the crew is making it longer and longer .....

Then somebody from the bridge whistles and one of the two that detached the rope in the back walks to the rope and releases it .... no rush .....

Well ..... Africa!!!!!!



The ship finishes its turn and starts making its way out into the open sea.



We come past some very sad looking boats .....

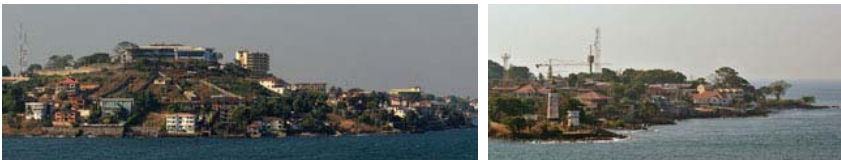
Today the weather is better and we get a better glimpse of the houses along the shore.



At an old house that looks very run down air-conditioned systems are installed and it seems to be inhabited ....



A hover craft is "parked" at a beach .....



The rich and the very poor live quite close to each other ..... the rich in large pretty houses inside of the splash-walls .....



.... the poor in shanty towns between the walls and the open water ..... waves washing up their "house walls" on high tide .....

We compare the harbours and their workers:

Dakar: We liked Dakar as the locals kept their distance, nearly no begging.

Conakry: The locals in Conakry were ok, but already a bit too "friendly" for our taste.

Freetown: We definitely do not like the locals in Freetown!

And this is the end of part 1 of this journey!

The next part will follow soon .....

No liability for timeliness, integrity and correctness of this document is accepted.  
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