

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

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)

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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 tyres 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 receive 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 Tobi 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	ETA
Hamburg	08.12.2015	08.12.2015
London	10.12.2015	10.12.2015
Antwerp	12.12.2015	12.12.2015
Tilbury	14.12.2015	14.12.2015
Hannover	16.12.2015	16.12.2015
Hamburg	18.12.2015	18.12.2015
London	20.12.2015	20.12.2015
Antwerp	22.12.2015	22.12.2015
Tilbury	24.12.2015	24.12.2015
Hannover	26.12.2015	26.12.2015
Hamburg	28.12.2015	28.12.2015
London	30.12.2015	30.12.2015
Antwerp	01.01.2016	01.01.2016
Tilbury	03.01.2016	03.01.2016
Hannover	05.01.2016	05.01.2016
Hamburg	07.01.2016	07.01.2016
London	09.01.2016	09.01.2016
Antwerp	11.01.2016	11.01.2016
Tilbury	13.01.2016	13.01.2016
Hannover	15.01.2016	15.01.2016

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 **Hamburg** 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, 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 boatand 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 tyres 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:

Destination	ETA	ETD
Hamburg	08.00	07.00
Antwerp	08.30	07.30
Brussels	09.00	08.00
London	11.00	10.00
Paris	14.00	13.00
Madrid	16.00	15.00
Barcelona	17.00	16.00
Palma de Maiorca	18.00	17.00
Algeria	19.00	18.00
Port Said	20.00	19.00
Suez	21.00	20.00
Aden	22.00	21.00
Yokohama	23.00	22.00

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 upand 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 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

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.



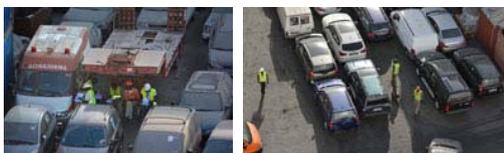
It is always interesting to see what kind of things are waiting in the harbour. And it is amazing how the vehicles are "optimized" to their full "transport capacity"



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 tool



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 sawing 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 sales 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 sales 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.

Destination	ETA	ETD
Hamburg	17 Dec	17 Dec
Shanghai	20 Dec	19 Dec
Antwerp	23 Dec	22 Dec
London	26 Dec	25 Dec
Amsterdam	29 Dec	28 Dec
Rotterdam	31 Dec	30 Dec
Montevideo	17 Jan	16 Jan

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 cocktails 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 hand 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 rubberprobably 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 no matter what religion



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 tool!
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!

Discreetly 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 is 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!

On Wednesday, December 30, 2015, we are already 500 km away from Freetown.

It will be 7 - 8 days until we reach Vitoria in Brazil, our next destination.

We are back in the "routine" eat, gym, eat more, read, eat more

The sparkling wine for the new year party has already been passed on to the kitchen and placed in the cool room

It is also time for a long overdue haircut!



Now we are ready for the new trip!

The crew is busy on the bridge deck.

Now that the cars on that deck have been unloaded they have to fix what ever needs to be done and clean it.

The water is black from the soot, oil and tyre remains.

Deck 12 (our deck) also gets a good wash it really needs it!

They also start the never ending job of repainting the ship



.... first with rust converter and then "Grimaldi-blue"

Ruedi gets the GPS position of the ship 3 times a day.

According to that data he calculates that if we keep this course and speed the equator will be crossed shortly after midnight.

There are at least 4 adult passengers, the boy, the steward Luigi and the two cadets that cross the equator on ship for the first time

We are all curious about what will happen tomorrow.

All we know is that the top deck has been cleaned and Marcello the cook is preparing a party for tomorrow

At dinner the newest schedule of our ports of call is placed in the mess room.

Grimaldi has added Paranaguá as exceptional destination of this trip.

Great!

Another port that we haven't seen yet.

But Grimaldi also reckons that we will reach Montevideo on the 14th.

This is only possible if the schedule that they show on the Internet contains buffer days.

Fact is that the ship now sails with approx. 30 - 31 km/h rather fast compared with the 25 - 28 km/h it had sailed up to know.

Well, we will see.

The only ones that really are worried about these delays are the family with the boy.

They have to immigrate to Paraguay no later than January 27th!

He tries to convince the captain that the ship visits Montevideo before it sails up the Parana to Zarate.

Luckily the captain tells him that he has no say in the schedule and has to stick to what Grimaldi tells him.

We are glad to hear that because we like sailing into harbours, especially the trip up the Parana to Zarate is very pretty.

Ruedi is right with his calculationsshortly after midnight we cross the equator



Our neighbours Ulrike and Wolfgang cross for the first time and take the memorable pictures. Thanks for sharing your pictures with us!



On Thursday we wake up to a mixture of rainclouds and sunshine the sun wins Another glorious day at sea in the long chairs ... reading guide books



The menu at lunch reveals that today we will have a BBQ!

After lunch the preparations for this evening's party start.

The party will be on the bridge deck as it is the only place where all crew and passengers will fit.

Tables are set up but because of the wind they have to be tied down with lashing straps.

Let's hope it will not get windier later on!

Some grills are also carried upstairs and wood piled up beside them.



After lunch a pig is being prepared in the kitchen.

It takes longer than anticipated and the cook is not happy the pig has to roast for 4 – 5 hours



But after a while the pig is being turned by some crew members

Susi gets the task to find out which passengers have not been equator-baptised yet when she passes the list back to the 2nd officer 7 names are marked

The 2nd officer will act as "Neptune" and asks us to give him a hand.



We gather in the captain's cabin where we work on the dress and the wig.

Luckily the crown and the trident are already available.

Then the captain tells us to advise the passengers that around 4 PM there will be the equator-baptising of the crew members 2 cadets and Luigi, our steward and it will be "a bit special"

The fire alarm goes off and the crew assembles with the west, survival suit and helmet on deck 12.

We gather upstairs on the bridge deck and watch from there.



The chief mate gives instructions and the 2 cadets and the steward put their survival suits on.

The chief mate explains to them that they will be lifted with the hoist and then placed in the water so they know how it feels to swim in the suits. Right after a life raft will be launched so they can swim on to it. Horror!!

Each of them gets a belt, they are hooked together and lifted by the hoist.



They look really worried ... the smiles a bit forced

What they don't see is that one deck up the captain is opening the water of a fire house



They also don't see Marcello the cook sneaking up on them with some liquid from the kitchen containing coffee powder, vegetable scrub a.s.o. Also some soap water appears and is also pored over them.



Then it is time for the fire house to be brought into action!



Later on the 2 cadets and the steward have to appear at the bridge and the captain vandalises their hairdo. They will have to leave their look like this for 24 hours



The pig is cooking nicely. It has to be turned constantly by hand

The table is being set, a musical system installed the party can begin.



The captain serves the aperitif and there is a photo session also with the 2 cadets and the steward with their new "haircut"



The "barbeque" starts with rice salad and spit roast



... followed by prawns, steak, chicken, another kind of beef Marcello the cook has outdone himself again.

After dinner the 2nd officer calls us it is time to get him dressed up. The captain insists that only water will be used to baptize the passengers lucky them! (Usually they are baptized with eggs, grease, flower and chocolate cream!)



We return to the party and after a while "Neptune" appears. The passengers are called one after the other, baptized and receive a certificate.



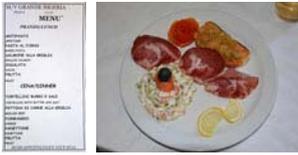
Then the 2 cadets and the steward are called again but their "sprinkling with water" is a bit heavier



Shortly before midnight Panetone and sparkling wine are prepared.
Then we count down happy new year! and safe travels!

On Friday, January 1st, breakfast is one hour later

Luigi, our steward, does not look good he hates the look of his head he will have to wait until 5 PM before he can shave the sad rest of his long(ish) hair away We try to comfort him that the hair will grow back and in a few weeks it will look good again, but he likes longer hair ah well, we let him sulk he's Italian soul is suffering



As lunch is as usual at 11 AM nobody is really hungry

But Marcello has prepared a pretty plate and we cannot resist and the backed pasta andthere is just too much good food!!!!

On Saturday the visit of the engine room is on the program.

For the ones that see such a large engine for the first time it is quite impressive.

In the afternoon the first wale is sighted just 20 m beside the ship!

Tomorrow we will all be outside and watch out for whales.

At this time of the year the area around Vitoria should be full of them.

In the evening it is Pizza time again the pizza Margarita and the Pizza Gorgonzola is well liked but the third one is a bit strange for our taste: Pizza Bianca (without tomato sauce) with French fries and sausage topped with cheeses

Later at night Ruedi is outside to get the emails via the Sat-Phone and hears a loud splash. Either someone has thrown the most hated "Primo" (first officer, chief mate) over board or it was a whale the closest we get to the whales on this trip

On Sunday the "Primo" is still here. Susi tries her luck with whales and heads to the bridge twice to look out for them without luck

Well, so be it.



In the afternoon the crew has a fire drill.

But it does not go well.

They are too slow and even one of the life boats does not start its engine!

The captain is not impressed at all.

The cook also has to participate.

Luckily he is released from the drill and can go back to the kitchen because today is Sunday special menu day with antipasto at lunch and in the evening with chicken schnitzel and chips!

This fully compensates for yesterday's pizza!

Some birds visit us.

It looks like the parents with two young ones.

They are very good gliders and sail past us many times.

They are actually faster than the ship just sailing amazing!

It is interesting also to watch them plunge into the water to catch a fish.

And for tomorrow Monday we set the alarm to 6 AM we want to be up when we enter Vitoria.

We already wake up at 5:30 AM the sun is just colouring the clouds in pink and orange

According to the GPS and if we keep this speed we will only be in Vitoria around 8 AM so we go back to bed

But we cannot sleep anymore so we get dressed and head to the bridge.

The officer on duty tells us that the pilot is expected around 10 AM plenty of time to have breakfast and go to the gym.

On and off there are rain showers and it is muggy.

Luckily when it is time to go outside the weather has calmed down and the sun comes out.



We see green water and a long white beach which is lined with apartment buildings.

It is called the Vila Velha, the old town.



The pilot is punctual but has a problem with getting on board.

The waves are too high!

After some fruitless tries the ship turns 90° and the pilot tries his luck with a bit more success

Because of the turning manoeuvre the ship has changed "lines" in the entry of the port.

As there is traffic on the entry lane now the ship has to leave the harbour into the open water, turn around again and approach the harbour on the correct side of the entry lane.



This delays the entry by almost 30 minutes causing a problem for the passengers it is lunchtime now but we would rather stay outside and watch!

We decide that we will only have a plate of pasta and then go out again to watch the entry.



The ship sails up the river.
On one side there are villas ...



..... and on the other side the city with its modern buildings, shopping malls, aquatic centres a.s.o.

Soon we knock on the mess windows to alert the other passengers.
Most of them rush out to take pictures and poor Luigi is left alone with the food.
The food we already had will have to do until dinner.
Big deal.



We worry that we might not pass under the bridge but there is plenty of space



After the bridge we pass some military installations



... boat harbours and less rich areas, which are colourful painted



... another aquatic centre with a rowing pool



... fisher men



... a small harbour with its Saint with a direct connection to heaven



It is a modern city at least with plenty of modern communication



The old and the new harbour blend into each other.



We reach the designated berth area and the ship is turned.
Sadly we berth on the side of the Vila Velha which makes an excursion into the city a bit difficult.



Two container cranes have to be moved to the front of the ship before the ramp can be lowered as the ramp will block the rails.
The lifting arm is usually up pointing to the sky and is only lowered when needed.
It would be too dangerous if it was down all the time as it could easily be sheared off by a moving ship.

As there are no cars left on the bridge deck we can now peacefully stay up there and watch and the chief mate has no more reason to send us down!
So now we can watch the lowering of the ramp which can only be seen from the end of the bridge deck.
For some of the passengers it is the first time they see this.



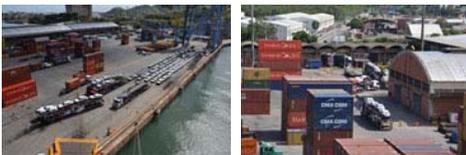
Soon the local authorities arrive and the hikers start gathering.
There are different groups and different uniforms.
It all seems to be very well organised not like in Africa!



Almost all passengers decide to go ashore.
The pedestrians are requested to walk on specified areas ... "in line" as they nicely write on the signs
Guards ensure that this is done properly safety first!



We stay and watch the activities around the ship.
The electrician takes the opportunity of having a stable ship to fix something with the lights high up on a mast.



Usually the new cars that are unloaded are driven out of the harbour or onto large car yards close by.
Not in Vitoria; here car transporters are used.
It is quite interesting to see the technique they use to unload/load the cars.
One group of hikers drive the cars out of the ship and other designated drivers (in other uniforms) carefully drive the cars onto the transporter
Again we are surprised about the organisation and the efficiency of the crews.

At 6 PM everybody has to be back on the ship just in time for dinner.
Everybody is hungry as we had more or less skipped lunch in favour of watching the entry into the harbour.
Around 8 PM loading finishes and shortly after the ramp is lifted.
Then the rain sets in again and we all flee inside.



Luckily later on the rain stops again and we can watch a very pretty leaving of Vitoria.

The waters start getting chippy again.
The pilot boat bobs around on the waves.
The pilots have a hard time changing over from the ship to the pilot boat.

Then the ship sets its course to Rio de Janeiro where they expect to be tomorrow at around 3 PM.
After another great harbour we can finally go to bed life can be so hard

On Tuesday morning Ruedi checks the speed and sees that we are sailing with 33 – 34 km/h which is quite fast.
If they can keep this speed we will be able to reach Rio on time.

We reach our destination after lunch.
The pilot is expected at 2 PM.

Around 1:30 PM the ship starts moving towards the harbour.
Sadly the weather is not too good, it is hazy and overcast.

We still get a good look at the famous Copacabana beach and its many kilometres of sandy beaches and high rise buildings
The pilot boat actually arrives a bit early and the transfer onto the ship goes swift and without hassle.



The ship picks up speed and we sail past some more beaches and into the bay.



At the entry of the bay the old military forts are still well preserved.
Rio de Janeiro is an impressive city.
Even though it seems modern there are plenty of old buildings around.



The airport close to the business district is very busy.



We sail past the old fort



... some navy boats and a dry dock



... a very pretty building which according to the guide book is a new Museum of Technology.
We reach the commercial harbour.



A lot frigate birds fly around the ship but are particularly interested in a small fishing boats.
No wonder!
They are cleaning fish and the scraps go straight back into the water where the birds pick them up.



The hills around Rio are covered with houses of the less privileged.



Just shortly before the large bridge that covers the bay the ship is turned and pushed towards the berthing place.
The officials and the workers are already waiting



A water fountain is brought for the local workers.
 We have never seen this before.
 It is also the first harbour where a toilet is available for the workers and where workers wear shorts!
 Some Peugeot and Volvo car models are produced in Brazil and then exported to Europe.
 Soon the loading of vehicles starts.
 The drivers seem to be paid by the piece!
 As soon as they finish driving a car out of the ship they run to the next VW-bus to be taken back to the ship.
 We decide not to go ashore but to enjoy a quiet evening on deck with the pretty skyline of Rio de Janeiro as background.
 The city is not in walking distance and to see Rio needs a bit more time



On Wednesday, January 6th, we are up early.
 The flag is raised
 It is a beautiful day and no clouds obstruct the view onto Rio and the Christ statue.
 We will have a very pretty trip out of the harbour.



They sure have loaded vehicles!
 The last few cars are loaded and the VW-bus transporting the hikes leaves our ship for the last time for this trip.
 They gather around the water fountain for a drink before they go home after a long night shift.
 Then the water fountain is rolled away finished for today

Around 6:30 AM the chief officer and the 2nd officer leave the ship and inspect the side of the ship that faces the quay wall.
 They do that every time before the ship leaves the harbour to ensure that no damage has been done to the ship while it was berthed.
 They also check that the load distribution tanks are correctly set to avoid the ship from cap sizing while leaving the berth.
 This happened to the Grimaldi freighter "Republica di Genova" in Antwerp 2007.

Then the ramp is lifted and the ship is ready to leave.
 The pilot arrives punctually at 7 AM and soon after the ship's ropes are released.
 The ship is pushed backwards towards the end of the quay wall where there is more water for it to turn around.
 The ship uses its own engine power to sail backward and is only stabilised by the tugs.
 This manoeuvre gives us just enough time to rush down for a quick breakfast.
 Slowly the ship is turned and starts sailing towards the open water.



We come past the fire-fighting boats ...



..... a pretty navy installation



... a fishing boat that drags another one along looks like the ones from yesterday with the frigate birds!



The TBC Princes leaves a grin on the faces of our neighbours, both medical doctors, as TBC stands for Tuberculosis

Then we realise that the TBC Princes actually is in distress she has run aground in the shallow waters of the harbour!
 Already two tugs are trying to push her free but without much success.
 The two tugs that help stabilize our ship leaves their position and help pushing the TBC Princes.
 After a good 10 minutes they actually manage to get the stricken vessel out into the deeper water.

We sail past the airport that is very busy at this time of the day.
 The city is very pretty.



Many small fishing boats are already out in the bay one of them in the way of our ship.
 The pilot asks the captain to beep the horn.
 Somehow the fishermen don't (want to) hear the horn and don't move.
 The pilot boat heads ahead gets them to move out of the way.



Then one last look onto the Christ statue and the cable car



..... Copacabana today in sunshine and we are on our way to Santos.
 Estimated time of arrival will be well into the night.

The swell is quite high today and during lunch we have to place the drink bottles on the floor as they keep tipping over every so often.
 A few weeks ago some of the passengers would have become seasick in no time with such a rolling of the ship.
 Amazing how one gets used to it or in other words: how one starts trusting the ship seasickness starts in one's mind

We are surprised that the officers have dinner at the same time with us.
 Seems that we will reach Santos shortly

After 7 PM we see the skyline of Santos but the pilot has not confirmed its arrival so the ship's anchor is lowered

Later on we hear that the pilot will come on board at "twenty-three one zero" ???
 Aha 11:10 PM

Before 11 the ship starts sailing towards the coast.
 The coast is lit up probably they illuminate the beach during the night to make it safer for the tourists.



The pilot arrives and the ship sails up the river.
 The city lights are very pretty.
 Even though it is after midnight we can hear laughter and children's voices it is after all summer holiday season!

The tugs arrive and the ship is turned around.
 It will be berthed at the same quay where we have already been with the Grande Costa d'Avorio in 2013 and the Grande Amburgo in 2014.
 Then for us passengers it is time to go to bed the crew will work through the night



On Thursday we wake up to an overcast day.
 The pilot is expected around 10 AM.
 So there is some time for the "morning tasks" like GPS-position, some guitar playing ...



A passenger gets some more plants for his garden that he wants to bring into Argentina
 The unloading seems to have gone well the ramp is already lifted shortly after 8 AM

Around 10 AM the tug arrives but not the pilot
 The ships engines are started still no pilot in sight

At 10:45 AM the pilot boat comes rushing to the ship and the pilots get on board.

If the ship leaves now we will be downstairs having lunch and miss out on the scenery.
 No way!
 Quickly we head to the kitchen and advise Marcello the cook that we might be late for lunch.
 But Marcello says that we cannot be late because he has to cook for the officers for noon.
 Either on time or no food.
 But he is preparing antipasto plates.
 That will do for us.

At 11 AM the ropes are detached and the thrusters start pushing the ship away from the quay.
 We head down, pick up or antipasto plate and some bread, bring it to the cabin and are back upstairs just in time!



The ship sails down the river rather fast.
 We come past some cruise liners



.... a dock with an interesting recycling method for an old boat some strange looking round things



... the favelas



As there is no more land available they start building into the river



... and the rich and the tourist (incl. us!) drive past all the time ... must be frustrating to be born into a favela ...



But it seems that slowly but surely the favela are converted into townhouses.

There seems to be hope after all

Only 45 minutes later we have already reached the open water just as the other passengers come out of the dining room

Well, too late

We head down, get our lunch from the cabin and enjoy the nice salami.

Then it is definitely siesta time.

The entry in to Paranaguá is going to be during the night again

After dinner the pilots arrive.

Around 9 PM we enter the bay and sail up the river.

We come past a light up construction site otherwise there is just darkness and the red and green lights of the buoys that are marking the way

Soon the sky starts to shine in reddish the lights of Paranaguá



The harbor comes into sight and soon the tugs arrive.

The harbor is very busy and all but one berths are taken.

Our ship is turned around and slowly pushed towards the quay wall.

It is too late to go into town so all passengers head to bed.

On Friday morning we see a few very tired heads and Luigi, our Steward, suddenly has a diamond in his ear

There is still some loading of Renault cars ongoing.

The pilots are expected around 1 PM.

So we head back to the cabins to do some work.



Suddenly our neighbours knock on the door there is a dolphin just outside the ship!

Quickly we head outside and watch.

Then the 2nd officer joins us and tells us that we have to go into town to the immigration department.

They want to see all passengers and check the passports.

We have to go down to deck 3 and wait for him.



On the way down we check on our vehicles.

The whole deck has been filled with cars!



After a while a man appears and tells us to come with him to the gate.

There we are let through the gate one by one and checked against the passenger's list.

The 2nd officer is not allowed out and is not too impressed about this action.

But the man promises him that he will return all passengers to the ship so the 2nd officer goes back to the ship to report to the captain.

By now it is 11 AM and we wonder if somebody has told the Marcello the cook that we have been summoned into town and will be late for lunch well, not our problem

We have to form 2 groups of 6.

The first group is driven into town to the immigration police.

Then our group is driven there too and we join the first group.

So far nothing has happened the little boy is thirsty some passengers are a bit cranky.....and the worst: nobody has money and on the other side of the road there is an ice cream parlour!!!

Then an officer appears and explains that we are exiting Brazil and all has to be done correctly.

We just don't understand why we had to come into town for this?

Usually somebody comes onto the ship and does the paperwork there

Anyway, the passports are handed back and we are driven back to the harbour.

There the bus already waits for us and soon we are back on the ship and a yummy Risotto is waiting for us



Around 1 PM the tugs arrive.

Shortly after the pilot boat arrives too.

For the first time we have a female pilot.

But we had also seen that there were plenty of women working in the harbour usually a "men's-only" bastion

The ship uses its thrusters to push and at the same time the tugs are pulling the ship away from the quay wall.



As soon as the ship has enough speed to be able to manoeuvre on its own the tugs leave it and head straight to the next ship that is already waiting for our berth crazy place

Now that we are sailing down the river during the day we see the large jungle area around the city actually the whole side opposite of the harbour of the river is a huge national park!



We come past the construction site some holiday towns and are out in the ocean again

We see many ships waiting most of them empty and wonder what this is all about.

We hear that the ships are bulk carriers, waiting for a space in the harbour to load their cargo.

Some of them have already been waiting for many weeks and the crew is neither allowed from board nor is food or water delivered to them strange

We reach the open water and sail south the last few days on the open water the next stop will be Zarate

On Saturday, January 9th, we are spoiled by Marcello, our cook.

We find some kind of vanilla croissants at the breakfast table and for lunch we get mangoes as fruit!!!!

During the night we turn the clocks one hour back.

Around 3 PM Ruedi wakes up because the ship rolls a few times quite strongly.

When he checks the GPS he sees that the ship has changed direction from south to west it has reached the entrance to the delta

On Sunday we see the coast line of Uruguay and the pilots come on board.

During lunch time we pass Punta del Este during dinner Montevideo

The water is quite shallow around Montevideo.

By the vibrations and change of the sound of the engine we can tell if the ship is passing a shallow part.

We hear that because the ship is not too heavily loaded the pilot has decided that the ship takes a shortcut not to the liking of the captain!

At one time only 0.5 m of water is left under the ship but all goes well and we sail out into the deeper water again.

The weather is not too good, it rains every so often but the sunset is great!

On Monday around 3 AM we sail past Buenos Aires.



Around 5:30 AM our neighbours knock on the window the sun is rising!

The light reflects in the high-rise building in Buenos Aires.



The ship sails in a channel.

A few more ships can be seen ahead of us.

At one time a large ship comes towards us.

Both ships are a bit too far in the middle of the channel.

Black smoke indicates that our ship accelerates and deviates a bit

The ships cross with max. 20 – 25 m of distance between the two ships at a speed of approx. 25 km/h



Around 7 AM we enter the river.

Now we have definitely reached Argentinian waters and the flags on the ship are changed.

Why is it always the same as soon as it gets interesting it is eating time!

Quickly we head down and grab a bite to eat no time for many coffees today!

Another ship crosses us but it is smaller and there is no problem.
 It seems to us that the last time there had been more oncoming traffic.
 We wonder if much has changed since we sailed up the Paraná in 2014 on board of the Grande Costa d'Avorio.



The police station still looks the same



..... but there are definitely a few new hotels!



Many "portenios" as the people from Buenos Aires are called have houses in the Tigre Delta some larger ones and some smaller ones



... some just have a tent



We come past some interesting set-ups an old ship turned into a house and maybe a brothel?



There are no roads to the houses and all is done by boat garbage collection, delivery of goods



We come past some wrecks and wonder a bit what this is all about



.... until we come past a place that looks like a recycling place for metal

There are some new installations along the river.
 They look like petro-chemical installations.



A strange looking ship is berthed in front of it.
 Expedient IMO 9389643. Later we look up the IMO number in Google.
 It turns out to be an LNG-Tanker built 2010.



We have reached an area where they seem to have tree plantations.
The holiday houses are now replaced by small shacks small shanty towns



Forest has been cleared and quite a bit of construction is ongoing.
Either the financial shock after the insolvency has not really touched this area of Argentina or somebody is investing China?



Zarate can be seen at the horizon.
More and more small harbours and industrial set-ups line the banks of the river.
They even have some roads and a ferry now.



We reach Campana and its harbours.
Here the River Paraná has some interesting bends.
The ship has to be manoeuvred through them very quickly.
Again we are amazed to see how such a heavy and "plump" ship can turn around in no time!
The ship in front of us is pushed towards one of the petro-chemical installations.
As it is empty and probably will load fuel here we wonder where Argentina has the fuel from to export



The "hotel ship" is still in use but we cannot find the second one that had been dragged into the woods four years ago



We reach the bridge.
The mast if the ship had been tilted to the side during the night.
It seems that there is not too much extra space left between the bridge and the ships Chimney



The ship is turned around.
This time it is not berthed at the quay.



The staff and the ropes are brought to the fixation point by boat.



The car yard is full with new cars.
The ones that will be loaded are marked for the hikers by an open bonnet.

Today the passengers that want to go ashore have to be patient.



A special immigration paper (shore pass) had been prepared by one of the cadets.
But somehow the rules must have been changed in the meantime today everybody will need the original passport to be able to exit the harbour

We decide not to go ashore but instead have a nice siesta, do some last washing and get prepared for Montevideo.
There is not too much time left



We notice that the Rio Paraná is flooding



On Tuesday morning the river Paraná has risen even more.
The water starts to flood the flat areas on the river banks but for the moment it should not cause a problem passing the bridge.



We are impressed by the amount of insects that lie around on deck.
Funny enough the side towards the harbour has far less than the side towards the open water of the river.
The cars that were loaded on Paranaguá are being unloaded.



We notice that the vehicles with open bonnets have changed.
Now a different type of vehicles is "marked".
Also some campers are ready for loading.

Around 2 PM the officer makes his rounds to collect the shore passes and the passports.
One passenger is not on the ship still in town.
They try to call him no success.

Later on he tells us that he had gone ashore in the morning and asked the chief mate who was on guard when he must be back.
The chief mate told him that he can stay out for the night if he wants as we will only be leaving tomorrow and the chief mate also did not write him down on the list of people that are ashore the captain is not amused

In the evening some loud squealing of wheels and banging of chains and metal part (probably shackles) tells us that the hikers are unloading vehicles on deck 6 and 7.
For that they have to drive down two ramps.
As they are paid by the piece they drive like maniacs!
From that point of view we understand that the chief mate does not like passengers guarding campers on deck 6

Around 3 AM it gets quiet.
Ruedi heads down to deck 6 to check if our vehicles are ok and finds all to be in order.



On Wednesday, January 13th, we are still berthed at the same position.
During the morning our neighbouring ship leaves and all is prepared to shift to that location.
But nothing moves, no more loading and unloading happens but also there is no lifting of the ramp we hear that they have a technical problem with lifting the ramp

This means they cannot move to the pier to load containers with the harbour crane.



The ship's own crane has to be used; the containers loaded onto some transport racks and moved from deck 6 to deck 3 over the steep ramp

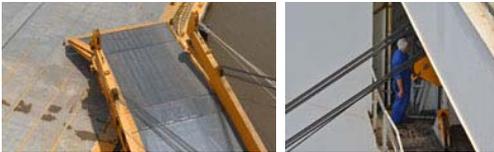


We also see that the water of the river Paraná is rising slowly but surely.
Since yesterday it must have risen at least one meter.
It is transporting green islands of floating plant-material that accumulates everywhere.

We get a bit worried and wonder if the bridge is high enough to let the ship pass but the agent of Grimaldi who is on the ship most of the time tells us that there is at least another 60 cm to 1 m of space left under the bridge very reassuring



A small container transporter arrives and gets stuck on the other side of the river! Luckily the river keeps rising and the ship gets unstuck, can berth and unload.



After lunch they try again to lift the ramp without success.....

Probably today's unlucky date "13th" is responsible for it

If it was for the sailors there would not be a number 13!

This is visible on the plans of the floor on the ship.



But we have noticed that not all plans lack the "13" the fire plan has a 13th floor! and our cabin has the number 1213 so for passengers it must not be bad luck



Anyway, in the afternoon the ship's cranes are used to move some containers around. We watch in amazement and a bit worried how the two workers stay on the container lifting mechanism during the whole operation Our neighbours, both Dr. med., already see the squashed tows and broken limbs in their mind

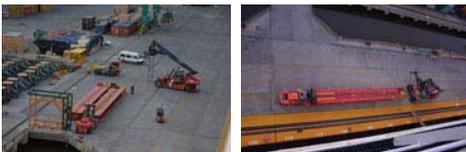


As we watch the container does not lock into the holding mechanism. They try and try but one edge of the container just doesn't fit seems to be a bit too long The ground crew arrives in their cherry picker, unlocks the holding mechanism, turns it around 90° and fits it again and then it works!

Around dinner time the ramp is can finally be lifted and the ship is moved to the pier.

Now the large crane can be used for loading.

Only 3 piece of cargo are missing.



When we see the cargo that will be loaded we understand hydraulic lifting ramps, each weighing around 22 tones



Around 9 PM the ship leaves Zarate and passes underneath the bridge without any problems

On Thursday morning around 5 AM we pass Colonia de Sacramento and later on Buenos Aires.



Without any problems with sandbanks the ship makes it into the waiting area for Montevideo.

After lunch we are allowed to bring our belongings to the vehicles.

It is always amazing how quickly the tings are pulled out of the camper and how long it takes to get them back where they belong

The pilot for Montevideo comes on board and around 3 PM the ship starts sailing towards the harbour.

On the way in the ship is crossed by a cruise liner.



Soon we reach the outer protection wall.
It is all new!



The ship cemetery has received a few additional ships.



But the old ship is still there



Otherwise the harbour has not changed much.



Frozen fishes are unloaded from Chinese trawlers and thrown into a freezer container.



The Grande Nigeria is turned around and pushed in backwards just behind a large cruise liner.



The local crew is already waiting.

We are all asked to go into the meeting room for immigration.

There we hear that the ramp is not going down

It is already close to 5 PM and we ask the immigration officer how long customs will be available today.

He has already made arrangements that they work until all our vehicles are cleared.

Shortly after the owners of the vehicles are gathered and informed that due to the circumstances we will walk to the Buque-Bus terminal, where immigration is and do the formalities without vehicles.

This takes quite a while, especially as in between a Buque-Bus ferry arrives from Buenos Aires and those passengers are cleared before us.

But by 7 PM we are all done and return to the ship.

Due to this delay we have the chance of have supper which we don't mind.



Then together with our neighbours we leave the ship and head to the exit.

After just a quick look at the temporary import papers we are on our way to the light house where we stay for the night.

And this is the end of this ship trip and journal.

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