



# Cycling Zen

BY KATIE ROBERTS

Could you completely “check out” for a year? That is, replace the trappings of 21st-century family life with a bike, a tent and a single pair of shoes and camp your way across East Asia and New Zealand? RAGNA SCHMIDT-HAUPT and AMIRAM ROTH-DEBLON are two German expats who have done exactly that, setting off with their two daughters in April on a 5,000km cycling odyssey. They’re currently in Northern Japan, pursuing the praiseworthy aims of taking a step back from the daily grind and raising awareness about renewable energy and sustainable living. We spoke with the brave couple about their big adventure.



**FROM TOP**  
Cycling in Namibia, Africa in 2009

Meeting samurai on a previous trip to Japan in 2013



Practice rides in MacRitchie Reservoir Park earlier this year

**R**agna and Amiram are no strangers to long cycling trips. We last checked in with them eight years ago, during the course of their 11,000km trip through 12 African countries. Since then, they've added two daughters to make a family of four. Now, after a couple of exploratory trips to prepare, they have set off on another, equally challenging adventure. With the children (Amaya is five years old and Tayanika is two) in a trailer and Ragna and Amiram on mountain bikes, they are exploring Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and New Zealand.

While this may send shivers up the spine of any parent who has faltered halfway along Singapore's East Coast Park cycle track, Ragna and Amiram are unfazed about making the journey with small children.

"We wanted to take a step back from busy workloads and the corporate career race to spend time in nature – and spend a lot more time with the kids. There's little room for outdoor pursuits in Singapore, and this is the chance to introduce the kids to Mother Nature while focusing on family and a sustainable lifestyle."

While it may be a dream for many of us to escape the rat race for a year, financial and employment realities can get in the way. So, how are they coping with these? Ragna tells us that she quit her job, which she concedes was risky, but she adds that in her line of work, the renewable energy industry, she's hopeful of finding a job when she is ready to return to work in a year or so.

Amiram, meanwhile, has taken sabbatical leave for one year and intends to return to work for the same company, although in a different role. The couple has been saving for several years to finance the trip, for which they have budgeted around \$4,000 per month. "That's for a family of four – we've built in quite a few luxuries and concessions on account of the children. A couple could do it for less than half that amount!"

Along the way, they're excited about discovering ancient Samurai castles and Buddhist pilgrimage trails, and for the children to experience Japan's kawaii ("cute") culture. They will venture into the scenic wilderness of Japan's northern island Hokkaido and the snow-peaked mountains of New Zealand while munching on local food along the way.

As well as seeing four countries up close – and no doubt meeting some interesting people – the two Germans adventurers are also building on their previous campaign to raise awareness about



**"We wanted to take a step back from our busy workloads and the corporate career race"**

Countless hours of preparation cycling around Singapore, and a warm-up camping trip to Taiwan in April 2015

environmental protection, climate change challenges, renewable energy, and the benefits of cycling and public transport.

So, they are raising money to plant trees in every country they visit as a commitment to afforestation (planting new forests). They're also offsetting the carbon emissions from the flights they take between the countries they visit. And their mode of land transport – cycling – is carbon-free. Finally, the family intends to call into local schools and meet community groups to discuss sustainability and environmental protection issues.

It sounds like quite the ride! *æ*

Follow the family's journey by reading their blog at [cycle-generation.org](http://cycle-generation.org).