

Brazilian's Life-Long Love for Bikes Make Him World Adventurer

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
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The starting point was Tizinisli, a small village with just 500 inhabitants some 400 kilometers (250 miles) north of Marrakech. From there Brazilian José Antonio Ramalho, aged 45, left in October last year, for a five-day adventure in the Atlas Mountains, a chain of mountains that stretches across Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.

Ramalho travelled in the company of five Spaniards and of his Sundown FS3 bicycle. They crossed 450 kilometers pedaling through desert landscapes and Moroccan villages where modern times and technology have not yet arrived.

Part of the Brazilian's experience was told in book "Mountain Bike Guide " (Guia de Mountain Bike), which he released two months ago through publishing house Gaia. Ramalho is also going to report the adventure in a book he should release this year telling his experiences while crossing three mountain ranges by bicycle: the Andes, in March last year, the Atlas Mountains and the Himalayas, in April this year.

They are part of a project that the author, who is a journalist and writer, is developing. The project is called Crossings (Travessias). Ramalho included the Moroccan mountain range in his route because he has always liked Arab culture. "I know Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon," he says.

One of the things that attracted the attention of the traveller while crossing the mountain range in Morocco was the isolation of the villages. "They live centuries ago with regard to technology. It is the purest part of Moroccan culture that is being preserved," he said. What impressed him most, however, was the receptiveness of the local residents.

"We found, for example, a man in a square in a little village. After half an hour's chat, he took us to his house and we had tea, his wife had just given birth," explained Ramalho.

The children who played in the roads were the main receptionists for the cyclists. "We were always met by children. They greeted us, said bye on the road, asked for sweets... When we did not give them sweets, they threw stones," recalls the cyclist, laughing about the matter.

They travelled during the day. At night, the group slept in the villages. The trip through the mountain range was accompanied by a support vehicle and tourist guide. The trip ended in the Moroccan city of Zagora.

Boy and Bike

Ramalho's history with cycling began when he was still a child. "I pedaled very much when I was a child and did it until I got to college," he recalls. After that Ramalho started studying Computer Science and spent years behind computer monitors. He taught computer classes at technical schools and wrote books about the matter.

Ramalho has published 104 books, of which 94 are about computer science. He also wrote children's books about Greek mythology and published photography books, an area he learnt alone. And he also ended up becoming a journalist.

Ramalho is a columnist in papers Folha de S. Paulo and Estado de Minas and in magazine Universo Masculino. He is also a contributor in other communication vehicles. The history of his love for bicycles was rekindled in 2004.

"I got my old bicycle, wiped the dust off it and returned to cycling," he recalls.

After cycling for six months, Ramalho was already travelling the Way of St. James on his bicycle with a journalist colleague. They rode 1,000 kilometers in a fortnight. "I placed the bicycle in my lifestyle, in my daily life, when I was planning my holidays, I thought about something I could do on a bicycle," he recalls.

In book "Mountain Bike Guide", Ramalho talks about the cycling universe and about bicycles. He makes suggestions about cycling, tells stories about his trips in the Way of St. James, Morocco and the European Valley, in the southern Brazilian state of Santa Catarina.

He also writes about the different kinds of mountain bikes that are on the market, about those most adequate for each kind of situation and person and also about how to upgrade a used bicycle, among other themes.

For the next book, about his crossing of mountain ranges, Ramalho is seeking companies interested in sponsoring the project, as he has managed to get tax breaks for those investing in it.

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