

ANNIKA WACHTER

*(Co-founder of the social project Tasting Travels. Currently she is traveling the world by bike)*

**S**o there we were at the border, willing to cross from Turkey towards Georgia. Roberto, my Mexican partner unpacked the passports that were stored safely somewhere in the bike panniers. It was a rainy day and there was not too much traffic. I must admit that I did not know a lot about the country and its people. I thought about Georgia as a small country full of mountains and Soviet buildings. Entering the futuristic border checkpoint I learned that I was mistaken. Everything seemed to be new and very modern. The knobbly building was finished in January 2011 by J. Mayer H and since then welcomes visitors to Georgia, representing the progressive upsurge of the country. I was impressed – not for the first time on this day.

We were allowed to cycle through the building and came out to the road. Our first impression was a very good one: it was green. Cycling the entire country, we followed clear water rivers, passed wetlands

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and fields, were surrounded by green hills and by rich green forests. The air smelled

## THROUGH THE GREEN

### A bike Travel trough Beautiful Georgia



Photos by Roberto Gallegos Ricci

like cut grass, green ponds and flowers. Bugs and birds hummed, children laughed and calves lowed for their mothers. It was easy to find some beautiful spots to pitch the tent for a night.

mate, was full of trees that I had never seen in my life. There were palm trees growing next to needle trees and I was especially impressed by the giant Eucalyptus trees and roses. Walking from the Himalayan to the Mexican section, we ran into some young men who were having a picnic in a resting space. They invited us to join them and before we even knew we held each a glass of beer in the one and a glass of vodka in the other hand. The toastmaster kept rising his glass and so did the rest of us. "I am tonight's Tamada", he explained to us "and I am the one responsible for the toasts."

He made all the men stand up, raised his glass, watched over to me and drank a toast

to the women. I felt very touched. We drank to guests, hosts, being together and making friends. When we got up to cycle back to Batumi, we felt pretty tipsy.

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Cycling around the flat parts of the country was easy. But every now and then we had to avoid some cows that did not care for the traffic. We stopped several times at fruit stands and small stores on the way. When we filled our water bottles and bought food, some people came closer. Usually the children were the first ones to come over and talk to us. Some of them came for their own curiosity, others because their grandparents sent them to find out who we are.

When we cycled into Kutaisi, the first thing I saw were large and grey Soviet buildings. I was a little disappointed but it did not take long until we arrived to the center. All the modern buildings overawed me. Our friend Archili explained: "Every couple of days you can see an opening ceremony of a newly constructed or renovated building here. Just look at this", he pointed towards the golden fountain in the middle of a roundabout, "this square has just been restored in May."

We kept cycling and were just climbing a large hill when a car stopped and a man came running towards us. "Welcome to Georgia!" he said, smiled and handed me a giant basket of strawberries. I was completely taken aback, took the basket and grinned stupidly. "Thank you" I answered, too baffled to

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