

News

TRAVEL TRIALS: Mr Baumann recounting his adventures at the Volvo showroom. Behind him is his car, with a tent mounted on the roof, which he sleeps in if a room is not available.

TNP PICTURE: KELVIN CHNG



Journey of a lifetime, 4-hour Causeway wait

Adventurer recounts how he was stuck in Woodlands as Swiss Embassy, LTA rush to get paperwork done for car to enter S'pore

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LUKAS Christoph Baumann survived a bomb attack in Iran and a night in prison in Pakistan. You would expect his trip across Europe and Asia to be smooth sailing when he approached Singapore. "You reach Woodlands (Checkpoint), and you think, this will be easy, half an hour at best," he said. But the lanky Swiss adventurer, 39, messed up his paperwork and was stuck at Woodlands Checkpoint for several hours last Saturday. He was allowed into the country after the Swiss Embassy contacted the authorities. He recounted his experiences to The New Paper on Sunday at the Volvo showroom at Alexandra Road last Tuesday. Mr Baumann's bid to cross the globe began late last year, after he quit as head of marketing and sales at

ZAHEDAN, IRAN: Suicide bombing

"Within minutes the whole city was filled with police, firemen, ambulances, security guards."

- Mr Baumann, on what happened after he and his friends were escorted by police into the town and settled into their hotel rooms

Gutzwiller Fonds Management AG, a subsidiary of a Swiss bank. He also sold his apartment in Zurich as he was moving to Australia for a few years, so that his Australian permanent residency doesn't expire.

He joked to his friend, Mr Shaun Rolevink, a radiographer and inspector in an oil field in Papua New Guinea, that he would like to drive his Volvo Polar to the Melbourne Cup horse race.

But after Mr Rolevink had a brush with death when a helicopter he was in crashed, the two men took the idea more seriously. They set off on 29 Mar from Zurich. Mr Rolevink ended his journey in Bangladesh.

Another friend, Mr Sebastian Wernli, accompanied Mr Baumann from Thailand to Singapore.

It was here that his journey almost came to a premature end when he got mired in paperwork, which resulted in his car not being allowed into Singapore and unable to return to Malaysia.

The reason: He did not have two documents needed to bring his Swiss-registered car in.

One was an International Circulation Permit (ICP) from the Automobile Association Of Singapore (AAS).

The other problem was his car insurance. He was told that he had to get insurance from a local company.

He said he was told to return to Malaysia, then come back without the vehicle, complete the documentation, before going back north to retrieve the car.

He said he could not drive the car back to Malaysia, as he had already exported the car from there. He had nowhere else to park the vehicle.

He said it was only resolved after he contacted the Swiss Embassy, which contacted the Land Transport Authority (LTA). The LTA, in turn, assured him he would obtain the ICP the following Monday.

He said he doesn't blame the staff at the checkpoint, who he said "did the right thing".

"But I was surprised a modern country did not have all the facilities for filling out forms at the border," he said.

An LTA spokesman confirmed that Mr Baumann didn't have his ICP and his Malaysian insurance was not valid in Singapore because the car was not registered in Malaysia.

Because Mr Baumann could not return to Malaysia, the LTA service provider allowed him to remain at the checkpoint while he sought assistance from the Swiss Embassy, which sent a fax at 10pm on Saturday.

After that, the LTA service agent assisted Mr Baumann with his vehicle entry permit (Autopass card) and Singapore insurance for his vehicle.

Mr Baumann arrived at the checkpoint around 6.45pm and the paperwork was completed around 11pm, the spokesman said.

As for why he could not get his paperwork resolved at the border, the spokesman said: "Motorists intending to drive their foreign-registered vehicles into Singapore need to obtain the ICP from AAS."

"At the same time, AAS will also issue the motorist with a local motor insurance to cover the vehicle for the duration of travel. Foreign motorists are advised to familiarise themselves with the requirements of the countries they intend to drive to so as to avoid any inconvenience."

Info online

The guidelines for Singapore are available at the LTA's OneMotoring website.

Lack of documents were not the only hiccup during Mr Baumann's Volvo Challenge, which is to drive his battered Volvo Polar from Switzerland to Singapore, before shipping to Australia, where he would traverse the continent. The journey is estimated to be 30,900km long.

Initially, he had hoped to enter Thailand via Myanmar, but failed to get permission to enter the secretive nation. So he had to ship the car from a port in south Bangladesh to Bangkok, while he flew there from Dhaka.

The car, which had already clocked 80,000km in mileage when he bought it from his father, has now done 307,000km.

But for some scratches, dents and a windscreen hole, the car has held up well, except for a few parts. Mr Baumann said the engine rubber mount was damaged while fording a river in Nepal.

He was in Nepal before entering Bangladesh. He said the car gets wobbly without it.

It was in these conditions that they had to drive the 650km to Dhaka, where they imported a replacement from Sweden.

But why did he drive an old Volvo instead of going with a more robust four-wheel-drive vehicle?

"To do it in a 4WD is too easy," he said.

He will leave Singapore either tomorrow or Tuesday for Fremantle, Australia.

After making sure the car is shipped, of course.



China national found dead on crane platform 15 floors above ground

A CHINA national, 33, was found dead on a tower crane platform 45m above the ground yesterday morning.

The site at 1 Dover Road is where the National University of Singapore University Town is being built.

A Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) spokesman confirmed that firefighters found him lying motionless on the platform at about 10am.

He had no pulse and was not breathing.

Said the spokesman: "The firefighters immediately performed CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) on him and prepared to lower him to the ground using a rescue rope and pulley system."

By the time The New Paper on Sunday arrived at the scene at about 11.30am, the body had already been brought down.

The man is believed to have been electrocuted, said workers who were at the construction site at that time.

Mr Zai, 38, a construction supervisor working in the site, witnessed the SCDF operation.

He said: "I think he was electrocuted while checking the crane. I don't know him, but I believe he was a mechanic."

A construction worker who declined to be named claimed that "the man worked with electricity".

The worker, also a Chinese national, said that he did not know the deceased as they worked for different companies.

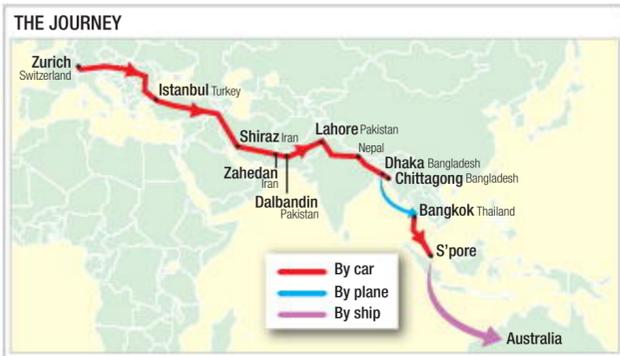
Other construction workers we spoke to were unaware of the man's death, mainly because they were working on the ground.

Police have classified the case as unnatural death and are investigating.

- Nurul Asyikin Mohd Nasir, newsroom intern

LONG WAY DOWN: SCDF officers climb down the tower crane after removing the body.

TNP PICTURE: KUA CHEE SIONG



Not all fun and games

ISTANBUL, Turkey: Baths

When Mr Lukas Christoph Baumann visited the city, he expected a flat town, not a hilly place like San Francisco.

His experience of a Turkish bath was getting whacked and soaped in by a "big Turk with muscles like a fighter", which made him wonder: "Is this a wash or some strange game?"

SHIRAZ, Iran: No Girls Allowed

After driving through the majestic gate of the ancient city, he and Mr Shaun Rolevink met their Turkish friends Ali, Sara and a boy nicknamed Heidi.

They were driven to their guesthouse, but just five seconds after going upstairs to their room, they were pulled out by three shotgun-wielding security personnel.

"This is because we went with a girl into a room, which is illegal in Iran," he said.

They explained their situation, but the policemen waited until Sara left the room before they left.

DALBANDIN, Pakistan: Jail

In Pakistan, the two men were again escorted by police on their travels, and they were supposed to sign in at a police station upon arrival.

But their guide decided to drop them off at a prison instead - because it was closer to his home.

"The people in the prison thought we did something wrong," he said.

They explained, but the prison warden said they had two choices:

1. Stay there of their own will,
2. Or he forces them to stay there.

"He said he never lets people out of prison at night, for their safety," he said.

He did not use the washroom the whole night or drink the water.

"The poop was up to here," he said, lifting his hand to knee height.

And the well where they drew water from was next to the toilet.

But it was not all unpleasant. Rather than being chained in a cell, they slept on the rooftop.

He joked: "It was the hotel with the most stars that we ever slept in."