

the **A-B-C** of Brazil

a: Every story has a beginning, and this one is no different. On his extended tour of South America, slackliner Lukas Irmler hung his lines higher and more spectacularly than ever before. We got to the roots of this trip. From **b** to **z**. Because **a** was at the beginning.

b:razil
192 million inhabitants, the world's fifth-largest country. Home of carnival, the rainforest, the Amazon, passion and emotion. The people samba dance at soccer matches and sip caipirinhas in the shadow of Sugarloaf Mountain. An emerging economy, a land with many faces, a diverse and handsome society. Now a hotspot for the international slackline community. See **g** for more.

C:urriculum vitae
CV or résumé: a chronological list of the things you have achieved over time. Some CVs focus on academic achievements. Some on career milestones. Some on records. Although one does not necessarily exclude the other. Lukas Irmler has a Bachelor of Science in chemistry, for example. He also holds multiple records in slacklining. Whether European record or world record, highline or longline record, entries in the Guinness World Records: Lukas has left his mark on the slacklining world. But for him the sport is not so much about records as it is about an opportunity to "let myself develop, work on my abilities and, bit by bit, make my dreams come true!"

d:river
Were we just talking about records? Yes, we were. Have we mentioned the attitude of mind that is often required? No, we haven't. Judge for yourselves: Peru, 5,222 metres above sea level. A small team travelled halfway around the world, spent days in a cold tent contending with altitude sickness and poor weather, until at last they were able to balance on a 21-metre long plastic band spanned between two rocks. Is that normal? Of course: Lukas had earned himself another world record on the highest highline as a result, but himself admits that "you've got to be slightly crazy". Although, without this craziness, without being driven, you are never going to push the limits, because you need to be crazy for the challenge. The next one after Peru is already lined up. In Brazil.

e:quipment
Setting up slacklines is not difficult, unlike highlines. Setting up a highline takes a great deal of experience and know-how, as well as the right equipment. Highlines consist of two completely independent systems: the band upon which you are going to balance, and the backup, which is usually a rope under less tension and positioned directly underneath the main line. The band and the rope are attached to different anchor points - secured, ideally, with two bolts and equalising anchor at each end. During setup, a closed steel ring is threaded onto both systems that the highliner can be linked to using a connecting rope. In the event of equipment failure such as in the worst-case scenario that the tightly-spaced slackline snaps, the highliner is saved by the redundant system. Lukas left his equipment for setting up highlines in Peru to save weight. After all, if you travel properly, then you will have the right local contacts. They were Gustavo Fontes and Caio Salomão Afeto, two slackline aficionados and subsequently Lukas' companions and organisers on the trip, with all the equipment they needed in their backpacks.

f:avela
Informal settlements on the outskirts of large cities are called favelas, which really means "slums". Immigrants hoping to find work in the city often start by finding a temporary if illegal place to stay here. However, in the 1990s Rio started a successful urbanisation programme to transform the rapidly expanding favelas into regular areas of the city. In one of these favelas, a small "warm-up" highline was created. Gustavo Fontes knew someone there who knew someone who knew someone. However, after much negotiation, the owner of the area was finally against the highline. If you do sport properly, though, you will not only warm up, but also down. Towards the end of the trip the crew came to warm down with a small trickline in "Vidigal" high above Rio with "an awesome view, clearly underlining the social differences that coexist here within such a small space. The 'Vidigal' stretched from there down to the sea, full of little huts and hovels. In the background was the dream beach resort of Ipanema, with all its skyscrapers and 5-star hotels," observed Lukas.

g:ávea
Skiing in Alaska, climbing in the Dolomites, trekking in the Himalayas. Every sport has its holy places to which pilgrimages need to be made. The ultimate to-do list of any serious slacker should include Lost Arrow in Yosemite, the Redrocks in Moab, Table Mountain in Cape Town, and at the top of the list: Pedra da Gávea. The almost 20-metre long highline 800 metres above Rio has become a classic, despite the three-hour approach through the jungle. That's because this huge granite block is really impressive, one of the largest rocks in the vicinity of the ocean. The line was soon set up thanks to the savvy locals Gustavo and Caio. Says Lukas: "Even though the highline was not very long, it was not an easy one to cross. The sheer altitude and the breath taking panorama over the city, the sea and the surrounding mountains, were quite distracting, but I enjoyed every second." These are the ingredients that make the Pedra da Gávea highline so legendary. Rapidly approaching bad weather put an early stop to the session and suddenly the main thing was getting back down the mountain as soon as possible. Was it because the rain would make the steep path down dangerous? Or was it because they wanted to celebrate Lukas' first highline in Brazil with a caipirinha? Who knows?

h:ighline
Highlines can be several metres off the ground, or several hundred metres up in the sky. Free soto means walking these lines without any kind of safety protection - the top end of the business. One mistake means death. Even with protection, highlining with 50 metres of air under your feet is as much an intense psychological test as it is a balancing act. Maintaining your focus amid such exposure is what separates the men from the boys in highlining. The elusive goal is to walk lines of more than 100 metres long. In 2012 Lukas earned his ticket to the exclusive 100+ club by walking the 103-metre line in Kost in the Czech Republic.

i:panema beach
"Tall and tan and young and lovely, the girl from Ipanema goes walking." These lyrics on the lightness of being were originally penned by Antonio Carlos Jobim, then put to music by

Astrud Gilberto. They have made the beach of Ipanema world-famous, and rightly so. What does Lukas think? "An amazing beach. The sand, ocean, and palm trees. Have I mentioned the sun and extremely pleasant temperatures already?" Yes, thanks, you have. Before we all drift off into daydreams, here are the facts: Ipanema Beach is one of the most famous slack spots in Rio. The local slacklining community meets here in the evening and at weekends. Time is passed by doing tricks and chatting. It's an ideal spot to meet new slackliners and hang out.

j:esus
Jesus! What a view, what a statue! "Christ the Redeemer" is the famous statue above Rio, and naturally became part of the cultural itinerary for the crew. "An amazing view across the whole city and Rio's surroundings," raved Lukas.

k:ilonewton
Now for a brief excursion into physics. A newton is the amount of force needed to uniformly accelerate a stationary body with a mass of one kilogramme up to a velocity of one metre per second. The kilonewton (1,000 newtons) is the standard unit of force in the construction industry. A kilonewton (kN) corresponds roughly to the weight that acts on a mass of 100 kilogrammes. For some highlines a tensioning force of up to 10 kN is needed, i.e. 1,500 tons. This means you could easily suspend a mid-range car from it.

l:ength
Longlines are slacklines that have an especially long span. A longline means that it exceeds a span of 30 metres. What if a slackline is exactly 425 metres long? Then you call it the European record longline. Exactly what Lukas Irmier walked in 2013. So if you put together **h** and **l**, then it is no surprise that a high-longline was on the cards in Brazil.

"let myself develop, work on my abilities and, bit by bit, make my dreams come true!"

"you've got to be slightly crazy"

- 01// Insane beauty in the clouds, but only visible for seconds - Pedra da Gávea.
- 03// Climbing up to the top of Gávea.
- 04// Caio preparing the highline setup.
- 06// Scrambling up to the granite slopes of Gávea.
- 07// High above the Serra do Cipó National Park.
- 08// Parallel highlining over the Tabuleiro Waterfall.
- 10// Riding the horses to the waterfall.
- 11// Watching a poisonous snake eating a frog.



"They turn round on the band and walk back again. Full man."



M:an

The man. Half man. Full man. What kind of man doesn't want to be a full man? Exactly. In slackline speak, a full man is the best style of all: walking there and back. Both directions. Everyone has a weaker side, too. Walking one way doesn't mean you can make it back due to changes in tension and differences in wind. But not for the full men. They turn round on the band and walk back again. Full man. Exactly!

N:ame

If you install a new line and walk it successfully, then you can give it its name. That is just the way it works in the slackline world. "No rest for the legends" is the name of South America's longest highline. Lukas walked it first. Full man, there and back. No time to rest. "Legendary" sums up both the location and the dimensions of "No rest for the legends", more about that later, because everything needs to be put in ...

O:rder

Order is important. Especially on trips. Trips have this tendency to deteriorate into chaos. Stuff needs to be organised: your equipment, your flight tickets, your lines, your reports, the chronology of your story. Why? Because the highlight is still to come.

P:ark

A park is a landscaped grassy area designed to provide aesthetics and recreation. A national park, however, is protected against all unwanted human intervention. Of course a national park can also provide aesthetics and recreation. Like the popular Serra do Cipó National Park in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, for example. This park covers an area of 31,010 hectares and is part of the Serra do Espinhaço, where the flora consists mainly of grass and bushes. The national park is known for its beautiful waterfalls. Just to keep things in their right order, though, we will talk about them later. Following an eight-

hour car ride, the crew stopped in a little village just outside the national park before visiting the waterfalls.

Q:uba

A quba is a breed of horse from Azerbaijan widely used in this country. As a working horse, or for riding, qubas are tough, stocky horses. Did Lukas and his crew ride qubas, or another half-breed of horse in Brazil? We do not know. But they relied on horses to reach their desired destination - the Tabuleiro Waterfall in the middle of the national park. Lukas: "We spent two hours riding over stock and stone and in the end I was so relaxed that for the first time, I was able to enjoy the surroundings." And onwards they rode to the highline spot.

R:ubber

Rubber traditionally is the sap from a rubber plant that dries to form a plastic-elastic solid. Today, rubber could mean many things. The majority of industry-produced rubber goes into making tires, where different types of rubber are blended to provide optimum load-bearing and road-grip characteristics. Hold on! Grip? Is that not something that plays a major role in slacklining? Of course, maximum grip would not work, though, because you need to walk as well. However, the feeling of "sticking to the line" is what Lukas and his buddies experienced when wearing the Slack Cruisers, which are equipped with STEALTH rubber, the best rubber for this purpose. Developed by the climbing-shoe company Five Ten®, STEALTH turned out to be the best rubber that had ever come into contact with rock. What proved to deliver the ultimate rock climbing grip also came to benefit the slack community.

S:amba

Samba is an expression that covers hundreds of different Brazilian dances that were first brought to Brazil by immigrant Africans, the Bantu tribe in particular. Fast hip movements and complex back-and-

forth upper-body motions, known as "bouncing", are what typically define samba dances. The world's largest samba festival is the Rio Carnival, where the presentations by samba schools are the highlight of the Desfile Parade. Samba is pure enjoyment, having fun with movement, colourful, authentic and intensive. Just like the adidas CC Boat Samba collection, which has excelled in the most incredible test of any dance space: a samba on highlines at the heart of Brazil.

T:riples

Lukas Irmiler, who walked not one, not two, but three highlines across the Tabuleiro Falls. Originally, the plan was to do two highlines, but having checked out both of them, Lukas reckoned there was another possible line right above the waterfall. They set it up between a rock outcrop at one end and the existing bolts and additional protection at the other. All three lines were then set up - the shortest at 22 metres, and the middle at 50 metres, were both quickly completed. But the big day, the successful completion of the triple, was still to come, because the longest of the three lines was a daunting 90 metres.

U:nbelievable

Lukas walking the last longline was simply unbelievable. "We set up the 90-metre long highline using a blueWing polyester band and I have never walked such a longline using this material," says Lukas. "I was secretly hoping that the line was in fact slightly shorter, but the laser distance measurer read 89 metres. We checked the whole rig again, as well as the tension. Everything appeared to be just fine, so I put on my harness and edged out onto the band. On the first attempt I walked a good 20 metres and was surprised at how well I could control the setup. I slid back and tried it out again. It went really well, I was moving quite fast almost without a mistake. The exposure increased with each step and in the middle I almost fell when

a gust of wind hit me. After around five minutes I was approaching the last third. The excitement was really building up; I was on the point of having walked the line when my muscles started to shake, partly due to exertion, but also due to the tension and excitement. I tried to breathe slowly again to get control of myself. About ten metres before the end of the line I made a severe mistake. Then, at the last moment I was rushing. I focused on the end of the line and started moving faster to cover the last few metres. I jumped the last two metres and managed to land on the protruding rock. Unbelievable!"

V:ery unbelievable

Two attempts on a 90-metre line? Unbelievable. But there and back? The full man? [See m] That is very unbelievable, really. Lukas says: "On the second attempt I was able to walk the 90-metre highline. Completely overwhelmed and surprised, I sat down for a moment and took in the view of the valley and the 90-metre slackline. After a couple of minutes catching my breath, I wanted to find out if I could manage to walk back again and stepped back onto the band. The first few metres were a real struggle with a mass of flailing arms, until I found my way back into the zone. Then it went amazingly well and only at the end did I start to notice how tired my arms actually were. It was a close call. Luckily, walking in the reverse direction did not seem as exposed and the last few metres were not as difficult psychologically. Consequently, despite total exhaustion, I managed to return to the safety of the end of the line."

W:aterfall

The Tabuleiro Waterfall is the third-highest waterfall in Brazil and an ideal spot for highlining. The water crashes straight down 270 metres, enhancing the view with an impressive and picturesque panorama. A breathtaking location, a place for special deeds and special emotions.

X:ácara

The Portuguese word for romance. Portuguese is the official language of Brazil, and xácara hits the nail on the head regarding the crew's feelings towards this incredible country. That is because the country [see w] and the people [see y] and the slackline scene are special, and go right to the heart.

Y:eah!

Yeah! Half the village was waiting for Lukas when he walked the 90-metre highline. Yeah! Some of them had even taken a day off to be there. Yeah! Suddenly they all wanted a photo with Lukas and wanted to congratulate him. Yeah! The longest highline on the continent had been walked at one of the most beautiful spots in Brazil. Triple yeah!

Z:oom out

Everybody has to return at some point. Four weeks in South America were enough for Lukas. He had achieved something unbelievable. Nevertheless, he zoomed out from Rio, via Paris, back to home. He is certain that, at some point, he will return.

