

BUSINESS MORNING

Freedom on Two Wheels

July 11, 2018 Author: [Heike Dürr](#)



The Heidelberger Stefan Knopf earns his money with what he likes best: He allows bikers worldwide tours with their own motorcycle. Its headquarters in the Kirchheimer Hardtstraße has a workshop, warehouse, six guest rooms and lounges. From there, Knopf organizes the transport of the machines by ship or by air freight, takes care of the necessary insurance and customs formalities. During the season from April to October, the rooms are fully booked, Knopf helps to tour planning seven days a week, provides maps, repairs bikes or rents motorcycles.

He does not advertise. His all-round service speaks in blogs, forums and at biker meetings. Once a year, he introduces his concept as a guest speaker at a major motorcycling convention in the US, and is also featured in many travelogues or books by globetrotters. So it happened that late in the evening an unannounced Russian biker

was at the door. He had heard of Knopf's all-round service in a remote bar in Mongolia. A Kuwaiti sheikh also came by unexpectedly for an oil change. "We have obviously done it to his satisfaction," smiles Knopf. Because currently he expects a container with 20 motorcycles from Kuwait. Bikers from European countries such as Malta, Iceland or Norway are now finding their way to Kirchheim. "With us, people get everything in one.

Knopf shares the enthusiasm of his customers, because even as a little boy he knew: "When I'm 18, I drive by motorcycle through the USA." This plan followed the trained baker with emphasis. Without language skills, he hired a freighter to take him and his BMW R 45 to New Orleans. The journey took him from Florida to Alaska and then via Denver and Los Angeles to Hawaii. Again and again he worked as a baker.



Back in Heidelberg, he took over a snack bar with his wife, which they ran for eight years. "The motorcycle thing always stuck in my mind." They sold their business and toured the US together. There Knopf met an Austrian who brought biker from Europe to the famous Daytona Bike Week. That's how the idea came about: "Driving your own motorcycle through the USA - that's the dream of every motorcyclist."

So in 1993, he founded adventure tours to enable bikers from around the world to make individual tours with their own machine. "The first customers spent the night in our apartment, we lent them our own motorcycle." They were so excited that the tourists published an article back home. Also bikers from Germany showed after first ads in motorcycle magazines quickly interest. "We immediately bought motorcycles for lending and after two years shipped two containers of machines for 35 people to the United States."

At first, Knopf built the racks out of old mattresses himself. He led the tour group through the United States himself, and soon came requests for further destinations in Mexico and South America. That changed with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001. The conditions of entry into the USA were tightened, motorcycles were suddenly considered dangerous goods. Added to this was the economic crisis in Germany, interest in biker travel to the United States almost came to a standstill.

At the time, Knopf had just become a widower and stayed behind with four small children. After weeks of traveling through America, he was no longer thinkable, so he stepped up his business with American guests touring Europe. He now has a half-day job. "Otherwise, the operation is a one-man event with family support."

In the meantime, he once again drives his motorbike through the USA once a year and visits friends he has found through Knopf's adventure trips. In addition, he undertook two world trips with his family. This is also the secret of his success: "I know exactly

what the perfect tour feels like, but also how it is when you arrive and the bikes are not there."

Although he is now happy about the end of the busy season and he pushes his own 25 motorcycles currently more than drives, he says: "For 25 years I live my dream."

The official company name is Knopf Motorradreisen, in international linguistic usage, on the website or in e-mails the term Knopf Tours is mostly used.

Apart from the season, Knopf mainly takes care of transport matters. *hDue*
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