



Family life on the Pacific coast

Max Planck scientists cooperate with partners in around 120 countries all over the world. Here they write about their personal experiences and impressions. Carolin Hillemanns from the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law spent seven months in California with her family. Here she met a bicycle thief, a lot of homeless people, just one Trump supporter and some remarkably friendly, generous neighbors.

Santa Cruz is the birthplace of mountain biking; moreover, the city has produced some legendary skateboards and is above all a Mecca for surfers. Even though it meant my husband had to commute to Palo Alto, we decided at a very early stage to settle in Santa Cruz a small, accessible city right on the Pacific Ocean, rather than in Silicon Valley, where the wealthy live secluded from real life and where the rental prices are horrendous. Even in Santa Cruz, we once had to move because the rent on the house we lived in would have been 9000 US \$ a month during the summer season.

It is hardly surprising that such a sky rocking housing market produces many homeless people, among them women, elderly people and people with mental illnesses. Many of them are drug addicts; drug-related crime is correspondingly high. The disproportionately high number of homeless people in Santa Cruz is also due to the fact that they are tolerated – unlike in other cities, where they are driven out of town.

Crime is a problem. Living in Freiburg we were already used to bike thefts, but in Santa Cruz it seems extreme. One afternoon, I caught a thief red-handed who carried my daughter's locked bike out of our back yard. I ran after him and shouted at the top of my lungs; he threw the bike over my neighbor's fence and strolled off, not really concerned. Everybody knows that you have to lock your bike as securely as possible. Otherwise, you should take it inside even when you go shopping – this is actually what people do.



Dr. Carolin Hillemanns, 46, obtained her doctorate from the Institute for Public International Law and Foreign Constitutional Law at Zuerich University. Her scientific research focuses on areas such as corporate social responsibility and transitional justice. Since 2007, Hillemanns has been working at the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law in Freiburg, where she recently took up the position of Research Coordinator. In 2018, she accompanied her husband to California for a sabbatical and continued her own work there.

Apart from this, Santa Cruz is a liberal, alternative city that seems to have almost as many dogs as inhabitants and is home to a vibrant music and art scene. However, I don't think that my children really got to know "the U.S." during the seven months we were there. California is exceptional, and Santa Cruz even more so: over the seven months, I met just one person who expressed support for President Trump – a tourist from Northern California. The annual Women's March showed us just how committed to Liberalism the city is. Thousands of people turned out onto the streets to show their support for women's rights and demonstrated against Trump. It was rather like the protests of 1968 – truly impressive!

Generally speaking it was a very exciting half year. We lived right on the Pacific Ocean and were able to cycle along the coast oftentimes carrying our longboards to go surfing. Even my youngest daughter who was just about to learn English got a taste of a completely different daily routine and way of life. This highly valuable experience sharpened our perspectives of both our homeland and host country. My kids all found out that classroom discipline was much stricter than in their schools back home and that the teachers were committed to all their students and treated them with great respect and goodwill. For my part, I was very impressed by both the academic and athletic prowess of many of these young kids and adolescents.

What I am sure to remember most is the help, support, friendliness and respect we received in California. We were overwhelmed with gifts. The Pacific is always cold, summer and winter, so our neighbors and friends gave us e.g. appropriate wet suits for the kids. The importance and value of respect and kindness are highly stressed and thus deeply ingrained in childhood education. It's quite likely that the mostly peaceful co-existence of people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds would otherwise not be possible.

I hope we will keep up this warmth and kindness in Freiburg, besides taking a more relaxed attitude towards life. By the way, my youngest daughter has now made up her mind where she wants to spend the rest of her life: in Germany.