



Newcomers to Tucson, professional triathletes Torsten Abel and Leanda Cave.

Bikes, Hikes & Swimming Pools

BY KIRSTEN KOROSK • PHOTOGRAPHY BY KRISTA JABCZENSKI

Professional triathletes Leanda Cave and Torsten Abel came to Tucson for the near-perfect weather, dozens of running trails and some of the best cycling terrain in the country.

The duo started coming to the Old Pueblo nearly five years ago for an annual training camp, but it's the community the couple discovered that kept them here.

"We would go back to San Francisco feeling so recharged," says Abel, who also coaches pro and elite amateur athletes. "We wondered, 'Why not stay in Tucson longer than a six-week training camp?'"

The couple made it official in November 2008 and moved into the Starr Pass subdivision on the city's westside. They both prefer the laid-back, relatively stress-free environment to some of the bigger cities they've called home.

Their favorite training regimens include riding out to Gates Pass and running the trails around Starr Pass. If they're not training, they may be at Primo at JW Marriot Starr Pass Resort & Spa; catching a concert at The Rialto Theatre; or checking out the shops and the scene near The University of Arizona.

"It's friendly here — it has character and there's a community," says Cave, a native of the U.K. and long-distance triathlon world champion.

"People seem to have a much more balanced lifestyle. Their primary concern isn't, 'How am I going to make my first million dollars?'"

Cave and Abel aren't the only pros tackling Tucson's steep grades and running trails.

As many as 60 professional cyclists and triathletes train in Tucson in the winter, and a growing number are living here full-time, says Brian Grasky, a professional mountain biker, pilot instructor with the Air National Guard and owner of Grasky Endurance Coaching, a multisport coaching business.

Several well-known coaches have established training camps, including Lance Armstrong's coach Chris Carmichael, who owns Carmichael Training Systems Inc., says Grasky, who moved to Tucson four years ago with his wife Jill, a professional mountain biker, coach and personal trainer.

The city's affordability compared to other triathlon meccas like Boulder, Colorado, and San Diego, California, also has contributed to its growing popularity.

"We can buy a nice house here for the same money that would get us a shed in San Francisco," says Abel, a native of Germany. "It's a dream to find a place here. I can already see myself sipping tea in my own house." **TL**



Most Likely Places to Run into a Triathlete

Swim:

The University of Arizona's Hillenbrand

Aquatic Center hosts the Ford Masters swimming program, which boasts three coached practices every weekday and one on Saturdays.

Bike:

The Shootout — a 25-year-old Saturday tradition — starts at University Boulevard and Euclid Avenue and attracts more than 150 of the best cyclists from here and abroad.

Gates Pass — McCain Loop: Cyclists often take Kinney Road to the McCain Loop in Tucson Mountain Park, and then return via Gates Pass Road.

The 26-mile climb up Mount Lemmon offers steep grades going up, and a speedy ride back down.

Old Spanish Trail — the eastside road takes cyclists along the base of the Rincon Mountains to Colossal Cave Mountain Park.

Run:

Phone Line Trail — this classic trail/road combo starts at the Sabino Canyon Visitor's Center and heads into the canyon, contouring several hundred feet above the paved road, before meeting up with it again about five miles later.

Broadway Trailhead — an eastside trail favorite located at the end of Broadway takes runners along trails in Saguaro National Park East.

Hugh Norris Trail — the westside trail takes runners to the summit of Wasson Peak, the highest in the Tucson Mountains.

Eat/Drink/Shop:

Trisports.com, 4495 S. Coach Drive — one of the world's largest online triathlon products retailers is headquartered in Tucson and sponsors a number of the local elites.

Fair Wheel Bikes, 1110 E. 6th St. — the owner Ralph Phillips co-founded the Shootout group ride.

Le Buzz, 9121 E. Tanque Verde Road — the city's eastside meeting place for cyclists preparing for and recovering from their ride up Mount Lemmon via Catalina Highway.

The Cereal Boxx, 943 E. University Blvd. — the central breakfast, bakery and dessert café is visited by cyclists after the Shootout.