Wanderlust

By Sujata Rajpal

‘Why do I travel so often? is the most frequently asked question to me,’ says **Anita Achar Raman** who is fondly known in her friends circle as the woman whose WhatsApp status is ‘always travelling’. Every conversation with her begins with ‘from where’ve you returned and where’re you travelling to next?’. Even before I shoot my first question, this travel buff is talking excitedly about her most recent trip to Gandikota – the spectacular Indian gorge in Andhra Pradesh that resembles Grand Canyon.

This globetrotter has travelled to countries like South America (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia), Europe (France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Italy, Switzerland), UK (England, Wales and Scotland), Central Asia (Uzbekistan), SE Asia (Myanmar, Bhutan) and the list goes on. In India, she has travelled to most states except Tripura, Mizoram, Jharkhand, and Lakshadweep. ‘My most adventurous trip so far was to Samaipata in Bolivia where I travelled alone,’ tells this travel buff. ‘It was dark and pouring when I got down from the bus to go to El Fuerte, a UNESCO World heritage site realizing that this was not the place I intended to visit. ‘It was slushy all over, and the street dogs barked, it was scary but soon another bus came, and a couple got down who were also looking for the same place. I had company and it was less scary,’ she recalls with a chuckle. The modus operandi a compulsive traveller follows is simple – decide on a destination, plan the outline of the trip, pack your bag and leave. The micro planning happens on the spot with tips from locals and fellow travelers. ‘The best way to discover a place is to travel like locals which gives you an opportunity to explore the local terrain, experience the local culture and hitherto unexplored areas. The fun lies in surprises and unforeseen,’ tells Anita who is a vegetarian but doesn’t see this as a handicap on her travels abroad. ‘Fruits and vegetables are available everywhere, so food is the least of my worries.’ Garam masala and Chatni pudi that she always carries with her are her saviour. ‘Many a time Chatni pudi turns out to be an icebreaker when I would be sitting at a corner table in some restaurant in a remote city sprinkling the spicy pudi over toast, someone will ask me about it and we would start talking and before I know it that person is my travelling partner for the rest of my trip. Even language is never an issue because someone will know English,’ says Anita. She learnt Spanish as a preparation for one of her trips.

Anita was initiated into travelling by her father who believed travelling is a great teacher. They would travel in and around the places they lived. Later in 1988 after her marriage to Raman, an Air force pilot she got additional wings to travel as his frequent transfers meant more areas to explore. Since 2007 when the couple made Mysore their permanent home, our travel girl has been unstoppable; she would just take off with or without a companion. She prefers a travelling partner because there would be someone to share the wow moments but if there is no interested partner available and the travel bug had already bitten her, she would go solo. Anita is a German language teacher and when she is not travelling, she is teaching German.

Even when the pandemic has put the entire world on pause, Anita travelled to Chanderi, and Orchha in Andhra Pradesh just before the lockdown was announced in March 2020. In 2021 she made a road trip with her family to Kumta Yana in Sirsi which was followed by another quick trip to Suryalanka Kakinada Vishakapatnam in coastal AP.

When I ask her if one needs deep pockets to travel so often, she waves a dismissive hand. On her travels abroad, she stays in hostels which are available for $ 20/night and the local food is also available at reasonable price. Of late this travel enthusiast has become a strong advocate of Indian tourism. ‘The travel conditions in India have improved remarkably such as the condition of roads, availability of good hygienic food and quality hotels at reasonable tariffs. Availability of clean toilets is also not so much of a problem as these days petrol bunks too have toilets. Home stays and Airbnbs have made tourism a lot affordable.’

The trigger for travel can come in the form of a photograph, an article on a place or a mention about it somewhere. ‘And my hands and feet wouldn’t stop itching until I have visited that place,’ confesses this impulsive traveler. ‘If you are a solo traveler, stay in touch with your family back home, so that they can reach you in case of any emergency,’ she advises.

The journey continues – the next on the list are Dhanushkodi, the last town after Rameshwaram , Atal tunnel under Rohtang pass, Georgia , South American countries of Colombia, Peru, Chile , Ecuador and China.

Replying to the question on top, this travel lover says, ‘We travel not to escape life, but for life not to escape us.’ Anita and Raman have a son named Armaan who is a 3rd year BSc student in St Joseph's College Bangalore.