



The natural beauty of
Old town of Zurich.

Wanderlust Becomes Her

Artists, singers, prominent social media figures, reclusive travel writers, production designers with a flair for visuals and fashion designers with a flair for drama, **Siddharth Dasgupta** talks to influential directors, actors, and professionals at the vanguard of India's indie scene. An uncompromising craving for travel is what unites their eclectic sensibilities.

WHILE THE JURY IS STILL OUT ON whether women make for better travellers than men, one thing is for sure: the women in this feature have some deliciously exciting, and surprisingly inspiring travel stories to share. Some prefer the roughed-out backpacker's route to Nirvana while others won't step out of their houses without their monsieur Blahniks, a few are intrepid souls whose search for blissful anonymity takes them to places strange, while others are creatures of desire who often fall back on the luxuriously tried-and-tested shores of the French Riviera. Time for a wanderlust-laden tête-à-tête.

YASHAS CHANDRA



Kalki Koechlin's Moment Of Karuna

Indie darling Kalki Koechlin views travel as the means

to a better self. "It means taking time to live. We get so caught up in the duties of our job, our rent, our family, that we forget to enjoy each other's company, to meet people who live at a different pace and who have different ideals or ambitions. Travel helps you be kinder and happier," she surmises. For the lauded film and theatre actor, a trip during New Year's 2014 to Karuna Farms, an organic outpost situated in the hills of Kodaikanal, confirmed just that. By all accounts, it was a simple affair. "It was just all my closest friends and it came at a time in my life where I needed comforting," she reveals. "There was no phone network or internet, only complete peace accentuated by rock pools, stunning views, trekking and nights filled with singing and playing guitar by campfire. We would dance all night and see the sun rise." While the experience helped Kalki reconnect with her friends while spending time away from her hectic schedule in Mumbai, it also led to an outpouring of creativity. "Everything in life inspires an actor, and this particular trip made me write more, express my thoughts and views more. Not long after it, I wrote the monologue that I performed at the India Today conclave."



A Solo Honeymoon For Sona Mohapatra

Bohemian singer Sona Mohapatra's marriage to Ram

Sampath in 2007 brought with it some unexpected adventures. "Ram's money had been embezzled, I had quit my corporate job to pursue music, had spent most of my savings in the production of my first album—things



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A couple breaks into an impromptu flamenco dance at Casa Anselma in Spain; the balcony of a cottage at Karuna Farms; the view from Karuna Farms; a flamenco guitarist entertains visitors at Park Güell, Barcelona.

were crazy at the time," she recounts with amused hindsight. "Instead of a luxurious honeymoon together, I took on a rough, solo backpacking trip," she sighs. But the trip would prove to be an epiphany of sorts. Sona toured the nightlife in Madrid and Barcelona, joined a flamenco performance and also climbed a bar top and performed *Dama Dum Mast Kalandar* to a crowd of at-first befuddled Europeans. "The fact that I was travelling alone let me engage very differently with the people and environment around me," she tells me. "From meeting a bunch of wonderful people in the French countryside and renting a château with them, to drinking champagne in a gigantic bathtub with amazing strangers (with our clothes on), reciting poetry and singing songs from different ages and cultures—crazy spontaneity was the theme of the trip," she reminisces. "I would call Ram often because I missed him," she adds. "But he would just be so generous and encourage me to simply have fun. That set the tone for our marriage, and in a bizarre but beautiful manner, made me rediscover my generous partner."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CHRISTOPHER TESTANI; COURTESY OF KARUNA FARMS (2); KADAMBARI MISRA



FROM TOP: The stuccowork lotus room in the Arsenal Tower at Thanjavur Palace in Tamil Nadu; the breathtaking Orpheus Island in Queensland; a street in Puducherry.



Sharell Maharana's Meditative Silence

For Content Editor of About.com

India, Sharell Cook

Maharana, meditating in a little-known healing cave up on Mount Arunachala in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu was a pilgrimage unto itself. "This experience came at the end of my 10 day solo trip in Tamil Nadu. There's a saying amongst seekers that it's grace alone that brings you to Tiruvannamalai, and that when the mountain calls you, you must go," she says. Considered a manifestation of Lord Shiva, the mountain, according to Sri Ramana Maharshi, is the source of a silent transmission that holds the mind. "This has led to Mt Arunachala being called the most silent place on earth," Sharell adds. The cave was small and unremarkable, but with the help of her guide Ashok, Sharell soon discovered that by sitting in a certain place, putting her hands in certain positions on the boulders on the roof and meditating, she soon began to feel light, relaxed and replenished. "I must've been in there for about an hour when my mind all of a sudden became completely quiet," she reveals. "There was nothingness. My guide told me to turn around and put my head on a rock at another point in the cave. Astonishingly, within a couple of minutes, I felt somewhat normal again." For the Australian married to an Indian, the spiritual experience that left her awestruck was "a potent reminder of why I was attracted to India in the first place."



Tokyo-To-Go For Mansi Mehta

"I needed a long vacation—so I bought a JP Rail Pass from Mumbai

and took off backpacking for a month across Japan," reveals National award-winning Furniture & Product

Designer Mansi Mehta. Mansi ended up travelling from Tokyo to Kamakura then onto Kanagawa and Hiroshima to explore traditional Japanese arts, before heading to Miyajima for its shrines, then Kyoto for a flavour of ancient Japan, onward to Kanazawa for a glimpse into the Samurai culture, before finally reaching Naoshima for the Setouchi Art Festival. "I've travelled a fair bit," she tells me, "but nothing comes close to Japan. The people there will go out of their way to help you and take you to your destination. The minute you try to speak in their language they are happy to help. I realised that whenever they found out I was travelling solo they would say 'Sugoi Sugoi' and gift me anything they had in their bag as a souvenir." From staying in Ryokans to crashing in a dormitory of 'capsules' rooms (originally created for drunkards and late-night workers), Mansi explored it all. "I felt I was on a different planet," she exclaims. "With their technology, their culture, their mannerisms, Japan was like nothing else."



Life Through A Swiss Prism For Rouble Nagi

"Recently I visited Zurich, Switzerland

for an art camp for three days along with some international artists. I was so mesmerised by its natural beauty and even more so by the exquisite art collections that I extended my stay for another three days to let it all soak in," artist and installation exponent Rouble Nagi narrates. For Rouble, residing at the Dolder Grand was akin to staying in a museum, with front-row seats to 124 artworks from 90 artists. "Masterpieces from Salvador Dali and Camille Pissarro to Henry Moore and Gerhard Richter, whimsical and vibrant works like Takashi Murakami's Troll Umbrella, installations by Jean Dubuffet... it was pure indulgence," she replies. For

Rouble, the most important part of the experience was her journey across the country where she was presented with a vivid palette of changing landscapes, hypnotic colours and nature at its pure best. “I still remember capturing the perfect landscape with a white horse running against a mountain as a backdrop,” she says. “Paul Cezanne said—‘Art is a Harmony Parallel with Nature’. I’m inspired for my new series, which I will showcase by December. After my journey, I believe Nature is an art form unto itself.”



Asmita Marwa's Spanish Serenade

For fashion designer and visual stylist Asmita

Marwa, a recent journey to Spain proved to be a catalyst for inspiration. “It’s hard not to be inspired by Spain,” she tells me. “It’s in the little things – the beautiful colours, the way the streets throb with excitement, and in the sheer diversity of the people.” I ask her which cities formed part of this experience, and she name-checks Barcelona, Mallorca, Madrid, and Seville. “Each had its own flavour too,” she’s quick to point out. “While Barcelona is very cosmopolitan, Madrid has an old-world charm to it, while Sevilla—its Old Town and the surroundings—feels as though it’s in a different era altogether.” And it’s Seville that ended up capturing her heart. “It has a very distinct aesthetic,” she replies. “You can see it in its show windows, on its cobbled streets, in its beautiful monuments like the Alcázar Palace was simply stunning—those Moorish influences, a distinctive architectural sensibility, the colours at play—everything was inspiring.” On a parting note, Asmita reveals that she’s building a home in Goa. Naturally, Spain is going to have a role to play. “I’m going to be using those beautiful old Moorish tiles—they have the most gorgeous geometric designs,” she signs off happily.



Marissa Bronfman's Romantic Pondicherry Prelude

“Nothing compares to the adventure of

discovering a new place with someone you love,” admits Marissa Bronfman. As the Founder and CEO of Bowl Bar, a new vegan café and delivery service, as well as Moxie Media, a boutique digital media agency, Marissa cherishes the discovery and inspiration travel affords. And that’s what Puducherry had in store for her. “After dreaming of a jaunt to Puducherry for more than four years, I finally went for a petit, romantic holiday in March,” she says. “We strolled arm in arm through charming streets punctuated with rambling French colonial mansions, biked through the Aurovilian forest for organic treats, saluted sunrise during our early morning runs on the promenade, and lazed in the afternoon sun by the gorgeous La Villa’s rooftop pool,” she says. A Canadian citizen who arrived in India a few years ago, now calls Mumbai home. Puducherry though has clearly left an indelible romantic impression. “This little town was full of inspiration, from the South Indian *chaiwallahs* on street corners to the old French and Portuguese tiles underfoot, to the boutique hotels and cafés... everything was pure romance.”



Queensland Calling Scherezade Shroff

A week-long invitation from the Queensland

Tourism Department turned out to be an adventurous voyage of self-discovery for Scherezade Shroff. “It was definitely the longest solo trip I’ve taken and it made me realise how much fun it is to travel alone,” relates the video style blogger whose Youtube channel has become the flavour of the ‘vlogging’ circuit. When I ask her what the best part of the experience was, “Everything!” is the reply. “The food was incredible. It’s a beautiful place and I got to surf, sky dive, and walk through the rain forest—all in a week-long trip,” she recounts. Adventure was the clear theme to her Queensland experience, proven by the fact that she managed to get over her fear of snakes when a python weighing close to 16 kilograms was dumped rather unceremoniously into her arms. ➤



FROM TOP: A flamenco dancer performs on the street; the Ginza, a famed shopping district in the eastern part of Tokyo.