

Business class, travelling

Economy

Aparna Shekar Roy leads everybody's dream life. When her corporate life begins to get mundane, she gets going. To get in touch with new people, places and sometimes, even with her own self. She leaves behind a comfortable life, as well as her husband, to set off on epic journeys. Going by the name 'Backpacking Ninja', her constant travel partners are a ten kilogram backpack and lessons in Brazilian martial art. Journey with her as she reveals her most exotic experiences with Team Titan.

When did you get bitten by the travel bug?

My grandfather worked in Indian Railways. He would often take my sister and I on holidays to the temple towns around India. The travel bug bit me on those great Indian train journeys. What started out as religious pilgrimages with grandparents soon grew into an addiction to visit new places. I could not afford a foreign holiday until I started working. And then, I guess the bug bit me harder.

Were you a tomboy back in school?

You bet I was. I played field hockey and learnt karate. I gave classical music and Bharatanatyam a skip at an early age. The day I wore a dress, it rained. [Laughs] I used up the nail polish that people gifted me to paint all the electrical switches in the classroom.

Do you remember the first time you took off to some random place without any plan in place?

Well, it was way back in college. One afternoon, I rode my Kinetic Honda from Chennai to Pondicherry to get lunch! And I landed up spending the evening at a small shack, talking to travellers. It was impromptu and memorable.

How many countries have you visited so far?

Twenty-four countries, counting Vatican City and Monaco. Soon it'll be twenty-five. I'm heading off to Indonesia next month.

What's the one bad thing about travelling alone?

You don't have a shoulder to sleep on during long bus journeys. [Smiles]

I'm sure you have plenty of stories from all the travelling you have undertaken so far. But

what's that one story you don't mind telling people over and over again?

'Un-bolivable' is the word I would use to describe this unforgettable experience.

I had never planned to visit Bolivia because the country didn't have an embassy in India to grant visas. On reaching South America, a place where nothing goes as per plan, I was travelling through Southern Peru on my way to Chile. Due to some political unrest, the border between Peru and Chile was shut.

What would have been a ten hour bus ride to Chile turned out to be a seven day detour through Bolivia. The highlights included:

visiting the highest city in the world, Lapaz, a crazy bus journey through a sand storm, driving straight for four days through the salt plains with pit stops at hot water springs, beautiful lagunas, and geysers. During the course of this journey I made three Colombian friends – Lina, Mauro and Diego. They gave me a hand painted Colombian passport as a goodbye gift, thereby officially declaring me as a citizen of Colombia! Something I will treasure for the rest of my life.

“Aparna's style of travel is free-spirited and spontaneous. She leaves her mark on the places she visits as much as they impact her. Just being around her when we hosted her in Chile was energising.”
Naaz and Mauricio Henao, Santiago, Chile

How did your husband react when you first told him about your plans of going to South America all by yourself?

Actually, it's very difficult to find a guy like my husband in the entire world. Not once has he questioned me on anything that I've ever wanted to do. And this time, it was no different. He just said, "I'm not the kind of person to come in the way of anyone's dreams. So, go ahead, live yours."

You must be having really cooperative bosses. Or, you must be getting them a whole lot of gifts from across the world to get your leaves approved. What is it?

I have been blessed with good bosses who have shared my passion for travel. Having said that, I extract leave for about thirty days, in parts. And also, send my superiors post cards to keep them happy. The last time I felt thirty days wasn't enough, I quit on a Monday morning.

Usually, what does your travel-bag contain?

I limit everything I need, to just ten kilograms. Also, I do a 'carry and drop test'. If I can carry it easily and throw it a decent distance, then I guess it's light enough to travel all those miles. The stuff I carry has a mix of basic clothes, swimsuit, a rain poncho and a sweatshirt which helps tackle all weather conditions except the freezing cold. In my daypack, I carry my mini Asus travel laptop, my digital camera and an iPod.

Did you manage to pick up any foreign languages?

Yes. I picked up Portuguese even before I travelled to Brazil as I practise the Brazilian martial art, Capoeira. I learnt how to talk fluently once I was there. I forced everyone to speak to me only in their local language. I speak beginners Spanish as well. In fact, I even have a blog in Portuguese, where I write about my parallel universe in Brazil. It's called quaseumescritora.blogspot.com. It means 'almost a writer'.

How would you define a 'Be More' person?

My favourite quote has always been, "If you are going to screw up, do it while you're young." And I truly think that a 'Be More' person is one, who would do anything he pleases without having any fear of being a screw-up.



Titan's pick

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Be more