

GLOBETROTTING FOR EVER

India-born Ashray Baruah and his Portuguese-Spanish wife Zara Quiroga have left a materialistic life behind and set out to explore the globe, criss-crossing 35 countries so far. By Madhuwanti Saha



The couple in Machu Picchu where they got engaged

What makes us envy Ashray Baruah and Zara Quiroga? Husband and wife backpack across the globe, sample different cuisines along the way and experience places in the most local way possible. Their travel blog Backpack Me, documents their journey, offers tips to wannabe global backpackers and is replete with pictures and anecdotes from their travels. Their story began in Dubai where both Quiroga – she is of Portuguese and Spanish descent- then a freelance media production manager, and Baruah, an Indian programmer, were working. Yearning to travel and desperate to break away from Dubai’s superficial lifestyle, they decided to quit their jobs in 2011, sell everything and globetrot “as long as the money lasts.” It’s been more than three years and the couple has been to 35 countries. “We feel this is just the beginning,” says Quiroga.

Oddly enough, the couple doesn’t have a home to go back to. But doesn’t being on

the move all the time get difficult? “Yes, especially when one of us is sick or feeling lonely. Those are the times we slow down, stay in a place for a while and get to know our surroundings better,” says Quiroga.

Travelling for more than two years, the couple is careful about finances and is always on the lookout for the best deals on flights and accommodations. But that wasn’t enough to make it sustainable. So they started working on the move on different projects, that includes a site dedicated to the world of bitcoins. Baruah is currently working with GapJumpers on changing the way companies hire people, while Quiroga is a freelance social media manager.

The couple is aware of the harrowing visa issues and often blogs about it. “I don’t have many visa problems. But Ashray has to apply for a lot of visas. We research visa possibilities by calling consulates or visiting them,” says Quiroga. In their blog they also offer lot of tips. The most important ones? “Get a backpack with wheels. Live in the moment. Leave



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Ashray playing with a sea lion in the Galapagos Islands

Travelling for more than two years, the couple is careful about the finances and is always on the lookout for the best deals on flights and accommodations.

your phone behind. Sometimes you need to pause and think of where you are, what it feels like, who is around you, and more. But most importantly, put yourself out there and make a move."

An interesting aspect of their travelogue is that it includes South America, which, barring Brazil, hardly gets any mention in travel writing worldwide. "Amazing" and "highly recommended" is how they describe their experiences. "You'll come across untouched landscapes," shares the media manager.

The couple has an unconventional approach as they choose to avoid all tourist landmarks. Quiroga explains, "It's more about understanding regular life. While travelling, we prefer spending time with locals in regular places and coming across interesting stories. For instance, we met a Mexican guy who claims to have been kidnapped. It was quite a hair-raising story. A Dutch lady in Cusco, Peru started adopting homeless children and eventually set up an NGO for street kids."

India stands out among the 35 countries they have covered so far. "The spectrum of what you see, experience, and feel from utter sadness to extreme happiness can astound you. There is no other country with such contrasts. There is never a dull moment here. Also, in spite of the overwhelming differences, people still keep a

smile on their faces and that's what makes India special," exults Quiroga.

Their journey gets more colourful with them being a multicultural couple. "We combine several perspectives. As we have already adapted to each other's culture, we experience less culture shock while travelling. This has also made us more sensitive towards understanding the nuances of different cultures. My fluent Spanish and Portuguese gave us insights into the life in Latin America while Ashray's Hindi helps in India. We would never be able to connect to people the same way without these language skills," explains Quiroga.

The two plan to travel for ever all over the world. What about family? "We definitely want to start a family sometime soon and have a base. But we will always keep traveling one way or another. We want our kids to grow up as world citizens. They already will be given that since they will be 1/4th Spanish, 1/4th Portuguese, and 1/2 Indian," she smiles.

Where do they go from here? Currently Australia and New Zealand are big on their wishlist. "Also we can't wait to get lost in Tokyo and explore local sushi and ramen joints. Since part of our heart was left in South America, we can't wait to go back and explore Argentina and Colombia. We weren't able to visit them when we went there," Baruah concludes

AMAZING MOMENTS WHILE GLOBE-TROTTING

- In a remote town called Lalibela in Ethiopia, we met a bunch of kids who just happened to love Bollywood—they knew everything about the movies and actors—and were thrilled to meet an Indian real life.
- In Costa Rica we saw the Pacific Ocean for the first time and learned surfing on a beach called Samara.
- We felt like we had travelled back in time to the 60s in Cuba as the cars were very old.
- Seeing bright blue glaciers in the south of Chile was one big wow moment.
- Meeting lions up close during a safari in the Masai Mara, Kenya was amazing. People in Cambodia will always present you with big genuine smiles.
- We enjoyed the best dimsum on earth in the cheapest Michelin Star Restaurant in the world, One Dim Sum in Hong Kong.



Skydiving in Dubai over the man-made Palm Jumeirah island

- Going off-road on a 4x4 in Oman we ended up in a remote village where we let the local children take photos with our cameras. They were amazed by that.
- In the Pacific Ocean, we got to see the famous Moai statues on Easter Island, one of the most remote inhabited places on the earth.
- Skydiving in Dubai over the man-made Palm Jumeirah island was a fantastic experience.

(Shared by Zara Quiroga via an e-mail interview)