

Travels With My Family

Sailee Sarangdhar and her friends define the new breed of teenage world travellers. Here she tells us what family travel means to her.

Most of us have travelled with our family at some point of our lives and it is these experiences that shape our travel behavior. Sharing new and exciting parts of the world with loved ones is almost always a great experience, and when it isn't, it is at least memorable. Not only is travelling important because we get to learn about the destinations we go to, but also because we get to learn about one another.

I come from an Indian family, but was raised in Thailand. My family consists of my parents my sister and myself. Living in Southeast Asia means that travelling around has been relatively easy and inexpensive. Countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia are all places that have been convenient and interesting to discover. However, when it comes to having a great time, Thailand has taken the cake every time. Over the past 16 years, my family and I have been able to visit nearly every nook and cranny of the land of smiles and no other holiday location has quite matched up. Every Christmas and New Year holiday is spent in the mountains of the north while we hit the beaches during the Songran holidays. Chiang Mai, Maesot, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Tha Thon, Lampang, Lamphoon all represent the North while Phuket, Krabi, Koh Tao, Koh Samet, Koh Samui, Hat Yai represent the south. I personally have a big thing for beaches, and Thai beaches are some of the best in the world. Nothing quite beats the pineapple smoothies one can find there.

India is also a frequent place of visit because travelling to see other family members and friends of my parents is also a part of the definition of traveling in my family's dictionary. As a child I visited Delhi, Agra, Jaipur and other tourist attractions with my family and other relatives. Goa is also a great place to visit while in India, but personally I prefer to limit myself to Mumbai and Pune, which are my parents' hometowns and also mine in some ways.

Other countries I've been to with my family are New Zealand and Dubai. New Zealand is an incredibly beautiful country; however, we were unable to travel around it very much because we were just too cold to be able to do anything constructive. Dubai however, was arguably one

of the most enjoyable trips we ever went on. The gender domination in my family unit means that shopping is an integral part of what we do while on vacation and so Dubai was great. Since we live in Bangkok, we are used to the quality of our shopping experience being high but Dubai was a place where shopping somehow more fun than usual. Dubai has a glitzy and glamorous side to it that borders on tacky, but the place is nonetheless a lot of fun. The buildings are all curvy and interesting and the shapes you see passing you by in a cab are different from the usual straight lines and rectangles of Bangkok.

Thanaporn Phuvanatanarunubala or Jah, for all practical purposes is one of my sister's closest friends from high school. She is a of a Thai-Chinese heritage and of all my friends, I would have to say that she has seen the world in the way it was truly meant to be seen. Jah's parents are very accustomed to travelling for work and for this reason, as a child she was able to visit an array of countries. "When I was a kid, my parents took me to Disney World in Florida. We spent five days there, and even though my younger sister, brother and I were too young to remember much, it was still really amazing." Jah also lives in Bangkok and so has been a visitor of the surrounding countries with what she calls her 'huge' family. "Family in my case can also mean my extended family like aunts and uncles and cousins, it's always fun being in a big group. We went to Italy in a private tour with my parent's friends and my uncle's family." She's also been to Japan which is where her parents went on



Clockwise from left, Sailee snorkels with her family; Jah with her family in Venice; Rebecca in British Columbia, Sailee and her family portrait; Yoon in youth.



honeymoon. “My parents met two other couples while on honeymoon and became friends with them. Over time, the friends grew apart, but at the anniversary party of a common friend, all three couples reunited and decided to go on a second honeymoon in Japan with their families. And so, I got to see Japan from a honeymooner’s perspective.” Jah recently returned from a tour of Europe where her father had to take a business trip but decided to make a family trip out of it. “My father asked all three of us which European country we would like to visit. My brother unfortunately had exams at the time so my sister and I picked one together. My younger sister is a great fan of musicals and so she chose London, England where we got to see Billy Elliot and The Lion King. The Lion King was especially wonderful and we thoroughly enjoyed that.” The work Jah’s father was involved in would be taking place in Paris and Versailles and so France was always on the table. “France was terrific and the experience is still vivid in my head because we got such special treatment. I love the fact that I got to visit the Louvre at night when it is closed to the general public because a gala dinner was held there. We even got to take intimate pictures with the Mona Lisa”.

Yoon Joo Kang, is one of my closest friends in college and is of Korean nationality. She moved to Bangkok when she was very young and since then, has called it home, as did I. Her parents and younger brother make up her immediate family and it is with them that she used to do most of her travelling. “Because my brother is so much younger than me, I grew up like an only child and as a result got to a lot of travelling when I was young. I’ve been all over Thailand.” She concedes that Phuket is her favorite local place. “So many places to see and things to do in Phuket. The most beautiful place I’ve ever seen is the scenery at James Bond Island. Not so much because it was beautiful in itself, but because I was so completely lost in that moment of time.” Although she does love Thailand with its sunny weather and great beaches, she says that her home country is quite incredible. “I still remember our trip to Mt. Sulak, which is where my parents went on honeymoon. It was so pretty.” Many of the trips that Yoon Joo took were because of her father’s business trips. “Because my father frequented Hong Kong, Singapore, and Korea a lot of the trips consisted of my mom and me walking around

new places and shopping for things. “I’ve also had lots of adventures during journeys. Most people spite flights, but I’ve always loved flying. I was once on the same flight as the Korean national football team when I was a kid. I remember one of the players thinking I was really cute, so I got to hang out with them for the whole trip! I also remember the first time I met an American. It was this little girl with a huge bunny. We were seated next to each other and played together for the entire flight. It was weird that we couldn’t speak each other’s language and yet understood each other entirely. That was one of the most interesting experiences I’ve ever had.”

I met Rebeccah McLean while on exchange in Australia. She’s a third generation Canadian, currently living in Victoria. “My parents were divorced when I was three so I grew up with my mother and two older brothers. When I was younger my brothers and I would visit my father for a month during the summer but this stopped when I was around 15. My mom went back to university when I was around seven.”

Rebeccah is now very accustomed to travelling on her own as I recall her telling me that she’d been to visit her brother in Korea on her own, lived as a ski bum in New Zealand for a month and visited Fiji before starting her exchange term in Adelaide, Australia. Fortunately for Rebeccah, her first trip abroad was to be Paris. “I hadn’t done much traveling with my mom until I was 17. We went on a trip to Europe for two weeks to visit my eldest brother. I had decided on this trip and my mom she’d come along so that I wouldn’t be alone. One of the most memorable days in my travels with my family was in Paris. I hadn’t seen my brother in three months so I was super excited to be seeing him again. My mother, brother and I met and wandered the streets of Paris. It was such an amazing experience, I had never been somewhere that was not English speaking; it was absolutely wonderful.”

Her upbringing adds an interesting dimension to Rebeccah’s idea of traveling, which involves outdoor activities like hiking and camping which are often not a part of the Asian definition of travel. When asked about the most beautiful place she’s ever seen, Rebeccah adopts the ‘no place like home’ attitude. “I have to say the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in all my travels is the interior of British Columbia.” /