



BREAK AWAY



VAHISHTA MISTRY IN MUMBAI

Vahishta Mistry, a 29-year-old marketing professional, had a car, a house (in Navi Mumbai), a well-paying job and a close circle of friends. Yet, last month, he did something most of us have only dreamed of doing. He upped and left. After selling his possessions, he set out to explore the world. In a fortnightly column starting today, he will talk about the places he visits and the dreams he fulfills.



The first step

How to tackle a life in which nothing is new? Travel for two years

As I type out these words out, I feel as if I am at the centre of a storm; around me swirl a million loose ends that need to be tied up before I put my life into long term storage, and become a nomad for the next two years. In order to properly understand my story, you need to meet me as I was about a year ago.

Everything about my life could have been summed up in a terse biography much like the ones I read in my marketing job. I was, in the words of research analysts everywhere, 29 years old, an SEC A+ urban male. I was single, but not unattached. I owned my own house, albeit in Navi Mumbai (I counted this as a positive) and I commuted by my (small) car to work every day. I had a mortgage, credit card payments and two cats that made demands on my time, apart from a hectic social life. Today, the cats are still around, but everything else is gone.

Change crept into my life when I first started hosting couch surfers. David Simon was a young Hungarian ex-banker with a crazy smile and a crazier story. He'd walked from Hungary to Dubai, and then, because he couldn't walk through Afghanistan and Pakistan because of a pesky war, he was forced to fly to Mumbai. He's now

somewhere between China and Japan, still walking. Stephen (I never learnt his surname) was an MIT professor. His too, was an interesting story — he is an expert on very large databases, and is routinely called to various companies and technical institutes, to lecture. By intelligently planning his routes (he is a database nerd, after all) he has visited almost every historically, culturally and otherwise significant place on earth.

I began to see the stark contrast between our lives. Mine was empty. I had tried to fill it with a house, car, a 42" television and other gadgets. All my pursuits were driven by an aspiration to fit in. I wasn't discovering anything. Nothing was new. I realised that I wanted, more than anything, to go out and see what was beyond the next block of buildings. I couldn't be satisfied with sitting at a desk any more. Within six months, I sold my house, quit my job and bought some tools — a Canon 60D camera, some lenses, and a MacBook Pro. I also bought a backpack and flight tickets. Along the way, I became a happier person.

Here's what I plan to do over the next 24 months. I will spend some days in England, from where I will head to New York. I will visit San Francisco, camping at national parks along the way. Then, I will make my way to Mexico and the famed Copper Canyon Railroad, via Los Angeles. I will travel along the west coast of South America, from Colombia to Argentina and end the year in Brazil in time for the 2014 football world cup. I will camp, hunt and fish in the Rockies and Andes, visit the salt flats of the Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia and see the Milky Way rising above my tent in the deserts of Utah.

You will keep me company through all this. Wish me luck.

SO, BASICALLY...

My initial budget is Rs 10 lakh. I've spent Rs 4.83 lakh buying flight tickets (Mumbai to Newark, 10-day stop-over in the UK was Rs 48,000; LA to Mexico was Rs 20,000; Brazil to Mumbai was Rs 1 lakh), a Canon 60D Camera, a MacBook Pro and backpack and camping gear (Rs 80,000). To save money, I will couchsurf, not drink alcohol, eat cheap, camp and travel by bus when possible.



Splash of Dali

Meet the famed Spanish surrealist in artists' town, Cadaques

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Costa Brava, where the mountain meets the sea, is a ruggedly beautiful part of north eastern Spain. Cadaques on the coast is called the 'most painted town in the world' with its steep cobblestone streets, jumble of fishing boats in red and green, white-washed houses with tiled roofs,

blue shuttered windows and cats curled up in small niches. It has been the haunt of intellectuals and artists from Picasso and Dali to Lorca and Henri Matisse. Dali often said that he knew every rock on Cadaques beach. Was Dali a genius, maverick or madman?

I drive on a narrow mountain road to Portlligat with a desolate landscape of craggy rocks and bobbing boats, where Dali bought a clutch of fishermen's cottages and converted them into a villa for him

and his lover, muse and wife, Gala. The home is as surreal as his art and offers a glimpse of Dali's life, as a man who disliked both, children and guests. I walk through a labyrinth of small rooms and twisting passages that are imprinted with Dali's personality and love for kitsch. There is the trademark sofa in the shape of lips, bundles of dried flowers, masks, rocks, driftwood and shells. Every window of the home frames the views of the bay like a work of art. Dali's studio



PICS: KALPANA SUNDER

Dali and Gala's bedroom dressed in blue drape and a mirror angled just so to view the sunrise



A digitalised painting of Gala that transforms into Abraham Lincoln under a lens



Salvador Dali's wife and muse



The trademark lips sofa in pink and Pirelli signs near the swimming pool



A woman at a window in Figueres, a painting of his hometown by Dali



The Royal heart designed by Dali with rubies moves rhythmically



Dali bought a clutch of fishermen's cottages in this village, and converted them into a villa

INDIA ON INSTAGRAM



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Children at play in Mahim clicked by Gopal MS in January, 2013

There's a certain discomfort about this photograph that makes it interesting. Knowing that this is a child with a toy gun is perhaps reassuring in the light of all the conflict across the world that weapons bring.

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

looks like the artist is still around, with paints and brushes scattered, and unfinished paintings on easels.

Dali's bedroom is even weirder. Next to a bed with blue duvets and blood red canopies lies a cage to hold crickets (Dali liked their chirping). Mirrors placed ingeniously allow one to witness the sunrise from bed. Dali and Gala's dressing room has a collage of black and white photographs of them hobnobbing with celebrities; Gala's circular sitting room has special acoustics — if you whisper anywhere you can be heard on the opposite side. Olive trees and rosemary bushes line the walk to the swimming pool, surrounded by fake snakes, a Pirelli tyres cluster and statues. "Here I have shaped my personality, discovered my love, painted my work and built my house. I cannot separate myself from this sky, this sea and these rocks," Dali had said of his house.

At Figueres, where Dali was born, I lunch at Hotel Duran, also a favourite haunt of Dali and Gala. The Dali Museum, which is the real reason for this trip, is an earthy salmon pink building, with the recurring Dali motifs of rustic loaves of bread (cast in plaster) and walls festooned with giant eggs instead of turrets and lined by cypress trees. It used to be the local theatre until it burned down in 1939 and one of the first places which exhibited the works of the young artist. It was converted into a museum in 1974.

Stepping into the Museum is like entering the maniacal mind of Dali. Conceptualised by him, there is no order of seeing the exhibits or an audio guide. Dali's different styles are showcased, as also his deep interest in holograms, optical illusions and 3D. Under a latticed cupola, a giant mural of a figure with an embryo in its head dominates the main stage room. I love the abstract painting of Gala which when viewed through a lens transforms into Abraham Lincoln. "Dali understood pixels much before mobile phones," says our guide.

Everything from the outlandish to the brilliant is in this room — clocks dripping like ice cream and elephants on spidery legs; eggs, crutches and bread. The Mae West

Room dedicated to the sultry actress is my favourite section. I climb to a vantage point on a wooden camel and look through a lens to see objects arranged in the room merge to form her face: the sofa become her lips, two paintings her eyes, the fireplace her nostrils, framed by an enormous wig made from real golden hair. What a magician Dali was.

Like all geniuses, his creativity spilled into many genres. He designed furniture, collaborated with fashion designers and in his later years, designed jewellery. An annex to the museum houses some of the latter: a red heart with rubies that moves rhythmically in and out imitating life, a sensuous pair of ruby red lips filled with pearls and a cross made from corals and gold. My visit ends in a simple crypt in the bowels of the museum where Dali's grave is located. After Gala died in 1982, they say that the artist lost his will to live, even attempting suicide once. After a life riddled with controversy and eccentricity, his grave seems almost too prosaic.



TRAVELPOINTERS

GET THERE: Fly to Barcelona and from there visit the Dali triangle of Figueres, Portlligat and Pubol. Portlligat to Figueres is 40 km.

STAY: You can base yourself at the charming medieval town of Girona, an hour away from Barcelona and convenient for visiting the Dali triangle.

COST: The Dali Museum ticket costs 12 € or Rs 930 (includes Dali Jewels exhibition). The entrance to his house at Portlligat is restricted to small groups of up to eight people and the cost of the ticket is 11 € or Rs 850. You have to reserve a slot by visiting the web site <http://www.salvador-dali.org/museus/portlligat>.

There are special rates for groups, students and old age pensioners.