

1 One of the smallest cities in the world, this Unesco World Heritage Site, Český Krumlov, is Hiranandani's favourite among the places she visited



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2 Serengeti: A place to connect with nature while spending time in the wild



3 With a local at picturesque Ladakh



HAVE LOVE, WILL TRAVEL

NEHA HIRANANDANI'S LOVE FOR OFFBEAT
LOCATIONS AROUND THE WORLD LEADS TO
HER PERSPECTIVE AT THE WORKPLACE

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One of Neha Hiranandani's very first memories of travel is that of her father, Surendra Hiranandani, teaching her and her siblings how to ski in the snowy landscape of Kashmir. The future director of House of Hiranandani was only four at that time, but the impact of that memory and the memories of the subsequent travels with her friends and family made her the nomad at heart that she professes to be. "My father has always been a passionate traveller. He made it a point to take us out to new places every year and made sure that it was out of our comfort zone. Besides, I have

always been drawn to arts and history. It's a sense of adventure and a curiosity about different cultures that drives me to travel," says Hiranandani.

She says that the best time she has had while travelling was in Africa three years back. About her trip, she recounts, "It was the most surreal experience I have ever had. Being around nature translates into an untainted experience." She continues, "With the usual tourist spots, you can follow someone else's trail and be sure that you're going to see the same things that they did. But that is not the case when you're out in the wild. You know the moment you have is just yours and is special to you." Her time in Africa involved a visit to Serengeti National Park in Tanzania, where she had various extraor-

dinary encounters. From having her camp taken over by giraffes to being surrounded in an open jeep by a pride of lions, she was exhilarated and in awe of the nature around her, all at once.

Another place that gave her memories of a lifetime is the small town of Český Krumlov in the south Bohemian region of the Czech Republic. The town, only eight-odd square miles large, surprised her when she found an Indian restaurant run by an American immigrant serving vegetarian food. "It was so refreshing to see an Indian restaurant in a town as small as that. Not just that, we ended up discussing the ongoing Indian elections of the time. The restaurant owner's travels in India and we found we had more in common than we expected. That is the

beauty of travelling — you meet such people when you least expect it," says Hiranandani.

Her wanderlust takes her to many unexplored locations, but she is not a fan of travelling alone. "I have always travelled with someone; be it my parents, siblings and, now, my husband. I like tagging someone along wherever I go." Her dislike of travelling alone, she says, is linked to concerns for her safety. "No matter how much research you do before any trip, you never know when you'll run into trouble."

The 30-year-old travel aficionado uses her novel travel experiences at work as well. "It's all a matter of perspective", she says. "When you're at work for too long and are surrounded by the same people every day, you are bound to get stuck in a rut. Travelling allows you to experience the extraordinary that you normally wouldn't. For instance, on our trip to Malta, our driver was also a professional boxer and was passionate about reconstructing old homes. He wasn't taught that he was supposed to have a single profession for his entire life, so he started doing exactly what he loved. Talking to people like him allows you to broaden your mind and see solutions beyond your own imagination."

Hiranandani has never kept count of the number of countries she has been to, but she definitely knows where she wants to go. While having a toddler by her side has restricted her from indulging in the more adventurous trips, she hasn't forgotten her dream of walking the Inca trail and exploring the culture-rich Mongolia whenever she can. In the meantime, she is planning a trip to Center Parcs, a European network of holiday villages, to spend some quality time with her 17-month-old child. Surely, mommy dear knows a thing or two about going places with her toddler. 