

#INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

A mother-daughter Euro adventure!

I believe the most beautiful thing in the world is the world itself. I am in love with places I have never been to. The wanderlust in me has grown stronger as the years passed by. The best of my childhood memories are the ones where we travelled to the unknown.

My favourite days of the year are when I travel. I passionately and meticulously plan every detail of all our trips — the destinations, hotels, flights, activities — you name it. In fact, planning is half the fun!

So, this year, my husband could not join us due to work commitments. My daughter Samara and I decided to embark on a mother-daughter Euro trip; something we have never done before.

The thought of being solely responsible for my 9-year-old for almost three weeks in a bunch of unknown non-English speaking countries was a bit daunting. However, a voice inside my head whispered; If I missed this opportunity this would be a lifetime regret. We packed our bags and off we went, away from everything and everyone else, experiencing new cultures and immersing ourselves in some incredible landscapes.

I have always liked the quaint towns/villages in Europe rather than the big bustling cities. Places you can marvel at.

Hallstatt is one such place. It is an alpine village in Austria that is mega cute. It is more than 7,000 years old. After a 3-hour scenic train ride from Vienna, we finally reached Hallstatt. It felt like we walked right into a Disney movie, lined with colourful gingerbread houses.

The whole village was dreamy,

unreal... just like a fairy tale! Usually, people visit Hallstatt for a day trip, but as we wanted to soak in all the magic of Hallstatt, we decided to stay there for two days.

Our hotel was right on the lake, Samara and I enjoyed our hot Milo and morning coffee on our balcony at the crack of dawn before heading out to explore the nooks and crannies of Hallstatt while the place still slept.

The historical town square is really tiny and super cute. Think colourful houses, waterfalls, small cafés, and a picturesque little square with a statue of the Holy Trinity in the centre of the plaza — everything right out of a storybook.

From Hallstatt, we drove south to Lake Bled, the most beautiful lake in Slovenia. Nestled in the foothills of the Julian Alps, Lake Bled is an enchanting place with emerald green waters. In the middle of the lake is an island church.

Our girl trip was totally girly; we got dressed together, coordinated outfits, my 9-year-old would give me fashion advice on what's cool and what's not! My mini-BFF and we listened to each other's favourite music, gorged on hotel breakfast, went bicycling, took the Pletna (the traditional boat) around the lake and soaked in the beauty of Lake Bled, loaded up on gelato and pasta and took tonnes of photos.

Our next destination was Romania. Since my childhood, I have always

been intrigued by the thought of Transylvania; it felt like an eerie make-believe place full of mysterious castles, as well as the legends and the myths of the bloodthirsty Dracula.

Samara loved visiting Bran Castle — the home of the infamous Count Dracula, she was as intrigued as I was as a child. And I marvelled at the stunning Peles Castle — the most beautiful castle in Romania — and Romania has plenty of castles.

Bucharest is a beautiful city with lots of stunning architecture, a testament to their glorious past. While roaming around the charming Old Town of Bucharest, which I found to be quite a labyrinth of cobblestone streets, we stumbled upon Cărturești Carusel — the most Instagramable bookstore in Romania, a renovated Art Nouveau building, dating back to 1903.

It's amazing to see how children evolve every year, how they become a little more themselves. We, as parents influence them in more ways than we are aware of.

Young children are innately curious; my daughter grew up so much, so fast on that trip. From a demure 9-year-old, she transformed into this confident, uninhibited girl.

I involved her in everything, how to search and book flights, hotels, calling a cab, which restaurants to pick, the sightseeing part, and everything you do to reach the airport until you board the flight. And this curious little human

absorbed everything fast. She became more independent, organised, aware, and tolerant than she's ever been. Travelling works wonders for kids.

Next, we flew to Malta, another place that's been on my radar for quite some time. Most of the island of Malta is formed by limestones, with rather steep coastlines against the luminous blue waters.

The Mediterranean gem is an interesting amalgamation of the East and West. This medieval island has a strong Greek and Roman influence along with Arabs, French, and British.

The Upper Barakka and the Lower Barakka Gardens, the narrow alleys with colourful balconies — Valetta is a charming little place that one could cover in a day. Here, I saw one of the most beautiful cathedrals of my life, St John's Co-Cathedral. This baroque cathedral was a dazzling display of gold, ornate architecture, and wondrous art.

The next few days, we travelled to Budapest, Bratislava, and Vienna. It was a whirlwind of amazing places one after the other.

Bratislava was just for a day trip for us, and Vienna and Budapest are two of my favourite European cities that I will never get tired of.

Truth be told, it was not all smooth sailing. Between missed trains and sold-out flights, I soon realised there's a thin line between an adventure and a disaster and it's often overlapping! There were hiccups and mishaps and a whole lot of improvisation. In retrospect would I change any of it? Not one bit.

By Adiba Hussain
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