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THE HINDU Cities » Hyderabad

A maverick globetrotter comes to town

Swathi V.



 **Carrying a phone would make me dependent on existing friends. Without a phone, I would be forced to talk to people, take their help and strike a friendship**

On a tour of the world since April 2012, this 27-year-old Frenchman has something endearingly unique about himself

The times are such that you would rather turn to the lady on Google Maps to guide you around the street than rely on a friendly stranger for directions. Well that's why you could be forgiven for not believing that Nathanoël Leprette exists: he doesn't carry a mobile.

For the 27-year-old Frenchman, who named himself "Yogo" for easy recall, nurturing contact with the unknown is more important than carrying around the safety of the known. This is why he prefers a lift wherever he can, and this is also what has kept him globetrotting for over two years.

"I have been travelling the world, to meet people, and to have social bonds. Carrying a phone would make me dependent on existing friends. Without a phone, I would be forced to talk to people, take their help and strike a friendship," Yogo says.

A world tour had always been his dream, even if it meant having to earn from the time he was 16, and avoiding the indulgences of the average teenager.

He set sail from France to Turkey in April, 2012, and has been wandering since. Avoiding Europe, which he had already toured, Yogo has visited over 15 countries so far, including Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Mongolia, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, and Bangladesh, apart from India.

“I find Hyderabad richer, and more westernised. Unlike Assam, and Bengal, it has women driving cars,” he notes.

Interestingly, his average expenditure is just Rs.500 a day, which includes travel, stay, food and visa. He avoids air travel as he wants to experience distances and time.

He has hitchhiked for 26,000 km, driven 12,000 km on motorbikes, and clocked even more on buses, trains and boats. Most often, those offering him a lift become his hosts, though he finds local hosts in each city through online travel communities.

“The media always dishes out stories of a bad world, but it is much safer. If asked humbly, people are often ready to help,” Yogo says.

“I travelled through two stretches of no man’s land between China and Kazakhstan. Chinese border security stopped me, but I persisted. Thoroughly fed up, they literally pushed me inside,” he recalls, with a laugh.

Being an inveterate foodie, he has tasted all varieties of delights, including insects and dog meat. Though his savings can last him only three years, he still has a lot of world to see, and plans to extend his tour.