

PICS: DURGESH KUMAR Y



# Around the world IN 10 YEARS

German grandma is on a roll – she's travelling the world on her bicycle

## MAHALAKSHMI PRABHAKARAN

A 63-year-old German granny, on a 10-year-long bicycle trip around the world, has stopped by in Bangalore. Sitting quietly at the rooftop cafe at Max Mueller Bhavan, Brigitte Kleine is wearing a simple grey T-shirt with a couple of dogtags around her neck and looks fit and enthusiastic. She doesn't know English and can't hear well but she doesn't let little things like that come in the way of enjoying life. We managed to strike up a conversation with her with the help of Paula, a German translator. And here's her story.

## RIDING OUT

Brigitte set out from Bad Salzflufen in September 2006. Though she mostly travels on her bicycle, she also flies or takes the bus if the situation warrants it.

So, why does she do it? Her genial reply is: "Travelling is not a holiday for me. It's a part of my life. I am 63 years old and don't have enough time left. I am retired and I don't want to waste time watching TV. I want to see the world like it is, now. I want to reach out to people and touch hearts."

## FAMILY SUPPORT

ask. Brigitte laughs as she goes back in time. "When I first mentioned it to my daughters, they couldn't believe it. They said I would never do it. My friends thought I was crazy. They didn't think I would be able to do a 10-year trip. They told me I'd be back in a year."

## KEEP GOING

But all that has changed. Her daughters find her travels normal and egg her on even when she says she's tired. "Oh no, mom," they say, 'Keep going'."

It is with a barely audible wistfulness that she reveals how her three grandchildren, aged 14, 12 and 10 years, cried when she left.

Has she gone back to her town and met her family in the last four years? "Yes, I went back after my trip to South America. I need to return home because the bike needs maintenance," she replies.

As someone who has biked her way through America, South Asia, South America and Europe, there have been lessons. She admits it's difficult to put it in words but manages to put it beautifully when she says: "How to get along with people, and develop feelings for people. In guesthouses where I have

tion with some people and I would speak to them using my hands and feet. I didn't need to know any language to connect with them."

## JUST DO IT

Brigitte's backpack weighs 56 kgs and she only carries es-

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sentials! But she has some simple, straightforward advice for anyone who wants to take off on a world tour: You can travel without any belongings. What is important is the wish and the willingness to do it. There are many people who say that they would like to do it but you really need to have the willingness.

As her son-in-law told her, 'You just did it, you



Brigitte Kleine doesn't speak English and can't hear well but those are little problems

## THE BEST...

Brigitte hopes that when she leaves India, she will be able to say that India was the most beautiful place. She also loved Mexico and Malaysia.

"I learnt a lot about the culture as I stayed in the jungle with indigenous tribes." That's what she loves and hopes she will get to meet indigenous tribes while in India. "This whole trip to India is special," she adds.

## ...THE WORST

Brigitte says the most difficult trips have been to Vietnam, Nicaragua and Honduras. Recounting a horrific experience in Honduras, she says: "I was robbed by a man. He actually shot at me. It was dangerous but because the gun was not working, he hit me with it. I was hospitalised for four weeks."

Naturally, her children were scared when they came to know of it but she adds with characteristic ease, "I couldn't see much of Honduras because I was