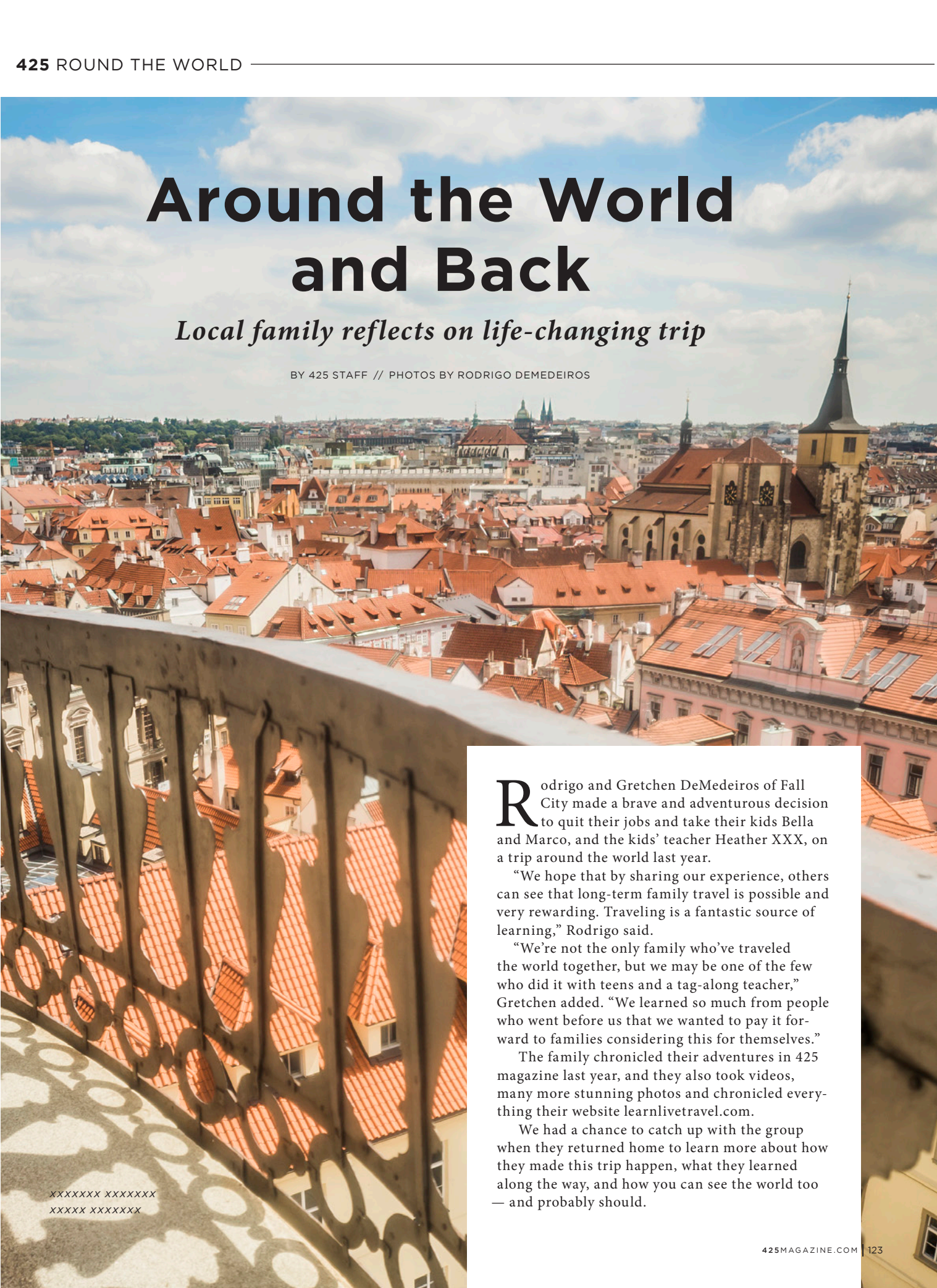


Around the World and Back

Local family reflects on life-changing trip

BY 425 STAFF // PHOTOS BY RODRIGO DEMEDEIROS



Rodrigo and Gretchen DeMedeiros of Fall City made a brave and adventurous decision to quit their jobs and take their kids Bella and Marco, and the kids' teacher Heather XXX, on a trip around the world last year.

"We hope that by sharing our experience, others can see that long-term family travel is possible and very rewarding. Traveling is a fantastic source of learning," Rodrigo said.

"We're not the only family who've traveled the world together, but we may be one of the few who did it with teens and a tag-along teacher," Gretchen added. "We learned so much from people who went before us that we wanted to pay it forward to families considering this for themselves."

The family chronicled their adventures in 425 magazine last year, and they also took videos, many more stunning photos and chronicled everything their website learnlivetravel.com.

We had a chance to catch up with the group when they returned home to learn more about how they made this trip happen, what they learned along the way, and how you can see the world too — and probably should.

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Rodrigo



Gretchen



Bella



Marco



Heather

When did you start planning the trip?

Rodrigo Three years before the actual trip — following a wonderful six-week visit to Brazil.

Gretchen For the first 18 months, we focused on saving money and exploring different itineraries. Whenever we got a raise, bonus, or freelance job, we put that money away into a special savings account. We checked out loads of travel books and watched lots of National Geographic and BBC documentaries to identify our broad travel goals. We talked about how much time we'd spend in cities vs. small towns, what kinds of big-ticket experiences we wanted to do (like hiking the Inca Trail and going on Safari), and whether we'd go during a school year or calendar year.

Why was this important?

Rodrigo Traveling has, no doubt, a deep changing effect in a person's psyche — it sparks creativity, compassion and a desire for learning. It is a very empowering feeling, because it takes courage to step out of your comfort zone. But once you do it, you know that there is no other way.

Gretchen I had lived abroad as a military child and traveled extensively in my teens and twenties. I really wanted my kids to have some kind of similar travel-life experience before they graduated high school.

What were each of you doing before you left for the RTW trip?

Rodrigo I was a video/film producer and director at a local ad agency in Seattle, with some occasional freelance gigs.

Gretchen I was a design program manager for Microsoft, when I left we were finalizing plans for Windows 10.

Heather Although I had been teaching while we were planning the trip, I worked at Dorian Studio Photography the year before we left.

What was it like giving notice to your employers — telling them you were going on a trip around the world? Were they understanding? Curious?

Rodrigo I had developed a really great relationship with the folks at the agency over the years, and telling them about the trip was much like a conversation you might have with friends. My family in Brazil was going through some difficult health issues, and we had already decided to spend several months there.

Gretchen I was nervous to share my news because I knew our plans wouldn't qualify for an official Microsoft sabbatical. I'd have to out and out quit a job that I really liked. My boss and team were disappointed that I'd be leaving, but truly excited for me.

Heather It was wonderful and my boss and work

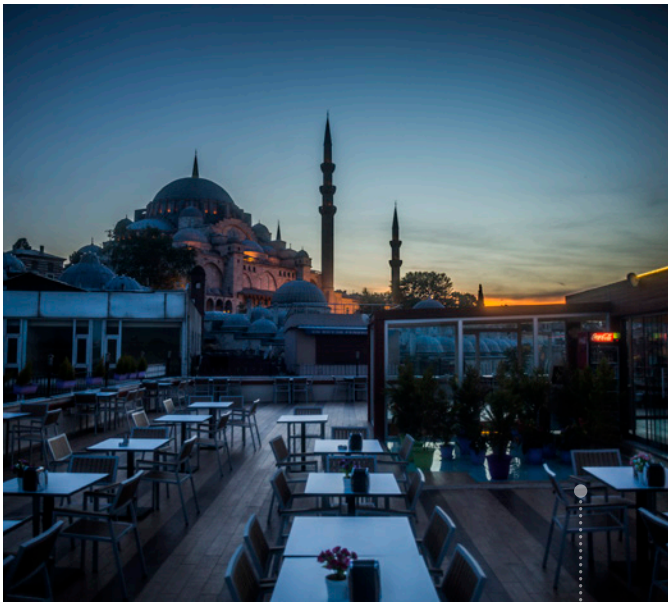
colleagues were extremely supportive of the trip.

Tell us about the planning process.

Gretchen We were in full-on planning mode for about a year. In the summer of 2013, we narrowed our itinerary down to three continents: South America, Africa and Europe. We then started figuring out details like flights, cities, length of stay in each country, and what to do about our house and school. We bought our first set of plane tickets 6 months before our departure date, and had our first country — Peru — completely scheduled by May of 2014.



Rodrigo The hardest element of the planning was deciding what we would do with our belongings, including our house. It wasn't until a few months before the actual trip that we found renters we trusted, and that just happened to need a fully furnished home. We did a big "purge" and stored the rest of our things in a 10-by-12-foot storage unit in Redmond.



Gretchen We planned each country in waves. After Peru was booked, we made a list of things we really wanted to do in Chile, and then hunted down affordable lodging. Once in Chile, we planned Argentina, and so on.

Tell us briefly about how Round The World (RTW) plane tickets work and how they can save people money.

Gretchen A RTW ticket is definitely cheaper than buying several one-way tickets. Travel agents who specialize in RTW tickets can get you deeply discounted prices per leg, but there are steep penalties if you change your itinerary or miss a flight. Our tickets had 14 legs, crossed the equator twice, and included one skipped-location-penalty; they cost \$5,230 per person.

Do you have RTW resources that were valuable?

Rodrigo We booked all of our stays through services like Airbnb, homeAway.com and VRBO. We used

Lonely Planet guides in South America and Africa, and Rick Steves guides in Europe and Turkey. And TripAdvisor for reviews on locations, attractions, etc.

Gretchen I loved the resources on BootsNAll.com The free e-course How To Plan your RTW in 30 days helped us break everything down into chunks. We also read a lot of travel blogs.

What are you doing now that you are home?

Rodrigo Our primary focus is really continuing what we started with learnlivetravel.com, but we are both aware that it's a long process. We are seeking funding for our series and documentary about the trip. About 48 hours after landing in Seattle, I was contacted by the agency to do a freelance gig in New York. It was terrifying but really exciting as well. I have been freelancing as a producer, director and photographer. I'm currently producing a series of videos in partnership with ArcMedia Studios in Seattle.

Gretchen I'm currently re-designing our website, transferring it to a different blogging platform, and optimizing it for search engines. I'm also writing a lot, connecting with other bloggers and travel companies, and seeking speaking engagements.

Bella I'm getting reintegrated in school and navigating my social life. My drama club is doing *Once Upon a Mattress* this year and I plan on trying out for winter cheerleading soon. I also got a job a few days a week.

Marco I'm back doing the things that I did before the trip. School isn't too thrilling though, since that means another year of work. In my free time I play soccer on my select team and paint Lego figures. Again, I don't really do anything other than the things I did before we left.

Heather After coming home, it was very important for me to take time to explore what I want to do professionally. I knew that going on this trip would open me up to new and exciting experiences and I

didn't want to come home and just keep doing the same thing I was doing before I left. Since being home, I've been privately tutoring, and researching new career paths.

What did you look most forward to before leaving for this trip?

Rodrigo Definitely a full "reboot" of our lives. There is just so much emphasis on having things because everyone is so consumed with adopting needs that they think need to be filled, constantly; the biggest house; the highest salary; the latest gadget ... Most people abroad don't spend afterhours or weekends checking their work email on a mobile device — it's considered a vicious practice. I was really looking forward to that level of personal freedom.

Gretchen I've been dreaming of visiting Peru for over 20 years, it was such a thrill to finally arrive in the Sacred Valley and hike Machu Picchu. I also loved escaping the daily grind!



What would you all say to other people who are considering a RTW trip?

Rodrigo Leaving your habits and old routines behind — it all seems daunting and impossible, but anyone can do it. Sell your expensive car and stop buying that grande latte every day — put that money into savings. There are numerous ways to go about it—it actually might take much less money than you think.

Gretchen Make sure that everyone is truly committed to the experience before uprooting yourselves for a year.

Bella Traveling is worth it. If you have the money and the physical ability, go for it. Save up, do your research, get a good sturdy backpack and some hiking boots and just go.

Heather Do it. Even if you think you can't, you can. Don't be afraid to

take that first leap. Many people won't understand (and might even criticize your choices) but that's OK. If it is important to you, you can make it work.

What surprised you the most about this trip now that it is over?

Gretchen I was surprised at how hard we fell in love with South Africa. It was amazing! Rodrigo and I are already scheming how we can get back to Africa for a longer time to explore more of the continent.

Rodrigo If I had to pick one thing that really surprised me, it would be how much I loved Turkey, and how much my ideas about that country were incorrect and misplaced, largely due to the ignorant notions and fear-mongering perpetuated by mass media. It's a Muslim nation, and has the most genuinely hospitable people I have ever met.

Heather What surprised me the most was that while I enjoyed every single place we traveled, what I will truly cherish forever are the experiences of travel, which you cannot plan for. The goofiness that emerges from delayed airplanes, the bonding over duel-vlogging and late-night conversations in a South African bungalow — these memories are forever embedded in my memory.

What did you learn about yourselves through this journey?

Rodrigo Traveling is a mindset, a state of



constant learning and transformation for me. I am still "in transit." I learned that I don't need much "stuff" to feel complete, and that happiness is made of moments, not things. Lastly, having a plan is important, but knowing how to adapt to change is equally crucial.

Gretchen I was reminded how much I love seeing new places, meeting new people, and trying new things. What I didn't know was how exhausting it would be to plan and organize for an entire family.

Heather For me, going on this trip has just driven home how important continuous learning and exploration is and how important it is to slow down and appreciate life.

How was the whole family dynamic?

Gretchen We won't say everything was peaches

and cream, because it's actually tough to be with your family 24/7 for weeks on end. Everyone certainly learned how to articulate his or her feelings and frustrations!

Bella It was pretty rough at times, for me at least; there was a lot of "cabin fever" happening for me on this trip. I think Heather was my savior in terms of being someone to hang out with that wasn't my family, and of whom was also a lot more up-to-date on memes than my parents.

Marco Being with my family 24/7 wasn't too great, but I managed. I wouldn't say it was absolutely intolerable, but I not going lie when I say I didn't totally enjoy it.

Heather I think that, as a whole, our group really worked well together. We learned to anticipate the needs of each individual, while at the same time

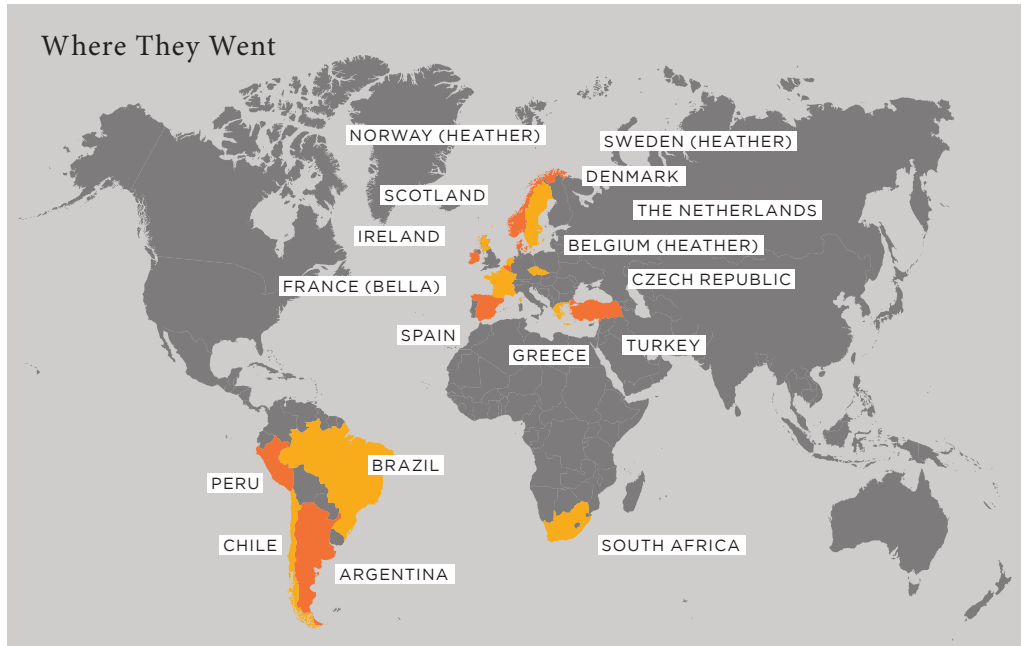
recognizing that some days, it just wasn't possible to please everyone.

If you could go again, what would you do the same/differently?

Rodrigo I would set no end date. Next time it will be Gretchen and I, the kids seem to have had enough of us for a while.

Gretchen If we did a family trip again, I'd find a way to have the kids "get away" to a camp, homestay or some other individual experience. They both would have loved spending more time with kids their own ages. In the future, when Rodrigo and I go as a couple, I want to travel even more slowly, and with even less stuff.

Heather If I had the opportunity to go with another family, I would definitely make sure that I planned some "alone



time" for myself into the itinerary more often. When I think about my future, I know that this is not my last RTW trip.

Was it hard to return to "normal" life?

Rodrigo Yes. This was not a vacation trip; this was a much more complex set of transformative experiences, and people just

don't seem to be able to fully understand that.

Gretchen Yes. It's hard to leave the traveling life behind. We're working every day to apply the lessons we learned on the road to our day-to-day life.

Bella Honestly, the re-entry has been really stressful for me.

Heather Yes. One thing that I think is hard to understand is the culture shock of coming home. While we were certainly not isolated on our trip, we were living outside the norm. It's very overwhelming coming home; even being at a restaurant, and hearing everyone speak English in the background, is sensory-overload.

Marco Nope. No problem at all.

How did this trip change each of you?

Rodrigo Travel has broken many personal barriers and fears, and now I know that's the only life I want

to live, and the only way that will allow me to continue growing as a human being.

Gretchen I hope I've become more patient. There were a lot of times that I wanted to do more or see more, but had to adapt my own travel-style to meet the pace of traveling with a family group.

Bella I'm more able to make connections between cultures and have a wider range of cultural understanding, which helps me understand the world around me more, and gives me context in other ways of life so that I can become a better person.

Heather This trip has renewed my travel bug. It's inspired me to never think that something is impossible. Meeting so many people, from various countries and cultures, has positively recharged my outlook on humanity.

Marco It made me be able to brag to my friends that I saw elephants in the wild. Pretty sick, huh?



Summarize your experience with one word.

Rodrigo:
"Transformation."

Gretchen:
"Fulfilled."

Bella:
"Milestone."

Marco:
"Challenging."

Heather:
"Inspirational."