



Jean and Nathalie left France 18 months ago with a route in mind that will take them around the world in four and a half years, through 40-50 countries. Number 24 on the list is Thailand.

When 44-year-old Nathalie Constantin and her husband, 50-year-old Jean, reach Chiang Mai in November 2010, they have many kilometres behind them. Traveling in a motor home, they have gone from their home in France up through Scandinavia, into Russia and Eastern Europe and from there to places like Greece, Turkey, India, Nepal and several more countries on their route.

"Jean would first like to go by bicycle, but that would have been too much for me. I'd get too tired, and it isn't comfortable like this," says Nathalie to Citylife when we meet them in their big auto camper neatly parked in Think Park by Huay Kaew Road. They do have their bikes with them for occasional trips without the van, though.

The couple through eleven years, six of them as husband and wife, plans to spend nearly three weeks in Thailand, including three days in Chiang Mai. They are enjoying their time here.

"It seems to be very easy to live in Thailand, even if you're a foreigner. In Malaysia, too," says Nathalie.

Like another planet

Malaysia, Turkey and India have been some of the highlights on their trip so far, but not all of them due to comfort and ease.

"The slogan of India is 'incredible India.' Everything is incredible. Here in Thailand, we feel like at home because life is easy here, like in Europe. It's not that different. In India, everything is different. Every single day, something will make you go, 'Oh!' It is like another planet," says

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Nathalie.

In Turkey, it was especially the hospitality of the people that charmed Nathalie and Jean.

“Every day, you meet somebody who invites you over. In France, things are very different. We have many Turks in France, but we never invite our Turkish neighbours over. When you visit Turkey, and you’re French, everybody invites you,” they explain, and Nathalie adds: “I think we meet nice people in every country.”



Choosing the road

The decision to leave everything behind in the city of Bellegarde - their house, their jobs, their families - for so long is one that Jean and Nathalie are sure they will never regret. The couple wish to not spend all their lives on a 9-5 basis, but instead go to explore all there is to see in the world while there is still time.

“Today I received an email reading that one of Jean’s cousins has passed away. He never got much profit out of his life. He was always just working and working, and then he died,” says Nathalie.

Of course there are consequences linked to the decision they made, and Nathalie says: “A couple of weeks ago, Jean got his second grandson, and his daughter said, ‘but you cannot see him.’”

Still, the two of them are determined to go through with their 54-months itinerary.

36 more months

When Nathalie and Jean leave Southeast Asia, they will head east to Australia and Polynesia, then continue through South, Central and North America before returning to Europe.

Naturally, they will both have to find new jobs when they come back to France sometime in October 2013, and the savings they made for their world tour are gone. But they might run off again someday.

“Jean has all kinds of plans to go to Africa and everywhere else after this, but I think four and a half years is enough for me to begin with,” says Nathalie. “It all depends. First, I would like to finish this trip.”

You can follow the further adventures of Nathalie and Jean on their (French) website, <http://www.natetjean.com/>

by Robin Petré

