

AROUND *the* WORLD

Eastside Family Escapes Daily Grind for Year of Learning

Top: View of Plaza de Armas in Cusco, Peru. Below: Marco playing soccer in Venice — the family brought a deflated soccer ball on the trip so he can play whenever possible.



Rodrigo DeMedeiros and his bicultural, binational and bilingual Fall City family recently set out on an 11-month RTW adventure. “RTW” stands for “Round the World.”

Mom Gretchen, 44; dad Rodrigo, 43; daughter Bella, 15; and son Marco, 11 left in the fall on their epic trip. They are accompanied by family friend/teacher Heather Holmes, who is helping them “road-school” the kids.

“We decided that it was time to shake things up, step out of our comfort zone and hit the road,” Rodrigo said.

Both Gretchen and Rodrigo were overworked, under pressure and often stressed out. Rodrigo’s daily roundtrip commute to Seattle as a photographer, director and producer at an ad agency sometimes took up to three hours, depending on traffic. Gretchen had been working the past nine years at Microsoft, most recently as a design program manager. The kids were showing signs of boredom and lack of interest in the overall educational system — and they were attending some of the best schools. “We all had enough of the daily grind,” Rodrigo said.

The idea to take a year off and travel was first sparked in 2011 after a six-week journey through Brazil with friends. The kids got to experience Brasilia (where Rodrigo and Gretchen met) and meet many of their friends from high school

and college. They spent two weeks with Rodrigo’s family in Natal.

“Coming home from that trip we started chatting about how fun it would be to travel more often, and for longer stretches of time,” he said.

More recently they traveled with Gretchen’s extended family for her parents’ 50th wedding anniversary. They spent five weeks in France and Italy — it was an enlightening “trial run” for their RTW adventure. “We explored different ways of facing some of the challenges we might encounter along the journey — from properly packing to understanding each other’s thresholds regarding pace, hunger and level of expectations,” Rodrigo said.

The family’s adventure will take them across South America, Africa and Europe. Their plans aren’t rigid. They want to see where this adventure takes them — and they are open to whatever experiences come their way.

“We want to go places and stay for a while, taking the time to get to know how local living feels like,” Rodrigo said.

“The possibilities are endless.”

So why pick up and leave careers and school?

“We believe that traveling is a need, not a want, and that by doing so we become better, more knowledgeable human beings; traveling opens our eyes and minds to new ways of looking at the world around us, making us more resilient, more respectful of others, more human,” Rodrigo said. “This is part of the legacy we want to leave our children. People always say they want a better world for their children, but perhaps that thought is backward — we need our children to become better adults so the world can be a better place.

“And we think seeing and experiencing the world is a vital step in that direction.” >>



We will be following the family’s adventures this year in 425 magazine. Rodrigo has been a longtime contributing photographer to 425 magazine. Read more and watch videos on their blog at learnlivetravel.com.