FROM travel groups to exchange programmes, the options are endless for those who seek to go beyond the clichéd travel formats, says Shraddha S.

FRESH OUT of college, Rahul Vador knew that there was one thing he’d like to plunge into before taking up his business duties — travel. Smitten by the wanderlust, business trips abroad, filled with a fixed agenda and client meetings, did not satiate the traveller within. “I definitely didn’t want a timetable sort of a tour and wanted to explore at my own pace,” says the 22-year-old. “I also didn’t want to end up spending too much,” he adds. And that’s when Vador stumbled upon The Backpacker Co, a student-friendly backpacking company specialising in informal, low-cost and fun trips around the world.

What followed were twenty crazy days exploring the whole of Europe, making friends from around the world and soaking into the complete European experience. “No tour would have given me this exposure at this cost,” he says. A stay in dormitories, using public modes of transport and getting locals to show him around — he ended up spending a fraction of the cost he would have on a tour operator.

HOP ABOARD
A plethora of options await young globetrotters who are still struggling to find a footing and have fewer resources at their disposal. They are now looking to dive into cultural potpourris rather than be witness to a passing experience.

For Hari Sawhney, hitchhiking across Australia was an "unforgettable divine experience." Having made friends with an Australian on a social networking site, Sawhney set out to explore the country with the Aussie in tow. “He knew how to get the best out of our trip at the lowest cost,” he says. “We hitchhiked for most of our travel, stayed in cheap student dorms, ate at local bistros and even got together with fellow backpackers to share the sightseeing costs.”

ON A DIFFERENT TRIP
Aalisha Sheth (19) — a Liberal Education student from FLAME University in Pune — had her dream travel to London fulfilled through a college theatre company. Ten days of travel, four shows of a riot-centric play and a chance to interact with theatre professionals from around the world made the experience unforgettable. “The learning begins right from the airport to the time you step home. Mingle with people from different nationalities and adjusting to their lifestyles got us international exposure the way no other trip could’ve got,” she says. A London university hosted the group and the college sponsored their travel and food.

From travel groups to exchange programmes, the world is an oyster for those who seek to make the effort to go beyond the clichéd travel styles. At a time when you’re relatively free and have fewer priorities don’t let the budget clam you. After all, you could learn some of the best lessons through travel.