

THEN *Civil Servant*NOW **TRAVEL BLOGGER**

## ➔ Jaclynn Seah

by TAY SUAN CHIANG

THERE was a time when Jaclynn Seah was like any other working stiff, feeling that sense of dread one feels after a holiday and having to return to work the next day.

The 32-year-old is now on a constant holiday high. When she's back from one trip, she's already packing for the next. Right now, in fact, she's in Bocas del Toro in Panama, taking Spanish lessons. The former civil servant quit her job in early 2016, and has been travelling around the world since.

"I've always wanted to travel for an extended period of time beyond just the two to three week vacation, and the only way to do that was to leave my full-time job," she says. "I had also been working for eight years since graduation and wanted a break from the rat race."

Even before she became full-time traveller, Ms Seah had given much thought about it. She had wanted to quit when she turned 30, but the timing wasn't right then.

"There really is no good or bad time to leave your job," she says. "I had been at my last job for four years, and even if I wasn't going to travel, I would have been looking for a new job anyway, so I figured why not now?"

Over the past year, she has visited Japan, Taiwan, Slovenia, Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. "I had a rough idea which countries I really wanted to see as well as some flight destinations which were fixed, but everything in between was decided on the go."

Ms Seah says her travels are mostly paid for from her savings. "I had accumulated a comfortable sum so I could travel without having to work along the way. In addition, she has been doing freelance writing since 2013, which helps defray some costs.

In Panama, she is taking language lessons at Habla Ya Spanish School. "I get lessons and accommodation in exchange for working and writing about them on my blog." Ms Seah started her blog, [theoccasionaltraveller.com](http://theoccasionaltraveller.com) in 2011. "The blog has gained a bit of traction since then so I'm pretty lucky to have some of these opportunities come to me."

But lest anyone thinks that it is all fun and games being paid to travel, Ms Seah says otherwise. "There are expectations when you travel on someone else's money. It is never 'a free trip' which is what everyone thinks it is. There is a lot of work and behind the scenes stuff, so while I do love the opportunities, most of my trips were at my own cost."

She stays in hostels "because it is cheaper as a solo traveller, and also it's easier to meet and talk to new people."

She prefers spending money on activities that lets her experience a place even if they can be a bit pricey, such as sky diving in Mombasa over the beach. She eats out mostly because that is the best way to learn about a new culture. Ms Seah makes sure that her budget doesn't limit her from experiencing a destination properly. "You're not really getting the full experience if you limit yourself to cooking cheap pasta every night and refusing to pay for any tours."

She has spent about \$37,000 over the past year, but has earned about \$14,000 from her freelance work.

After South America, she hopes to go diving in Flores, before returning to Singapore. Then it will be back to finding a job. "I'm considering looking for opportunities to work overseas and live overseas for a bit, to experience another different sort of travel," she says.



From left: Jaclynn Seah on the Swing At The End Of The World, Ecuador; and at the Warsaw Praga Neon Museum, Poland; Audrey Ng at The Elly Shop; Marc Nair.

PHOTO JACLYNN SEAH

THEN *Lawyer*NOW **CHILDREN'S CLOTHES DESIGNER**

## ➔ Audrey Ng

by CHEAH UI-HOON

AUDREY Ng, 39, had been designing clothes for almost as long as she'd been practising law, so maybe it wasn't a surprise that she quit her day job to pursue her hobby as a business.

But it was never her "dream" per se to start a retail business selling children's clothes, she admits. She and her sister, Carol, started The Elly Shop at Cluny Court in March 2012, retailing clothing for children up to six years old. A year later they also started Twelve by Elly, for children from six to the teens.

"I love fabrics, and that's how I got into designing clothes and also now, fabrics, besides children's clothes," relates Ms Ng. The children's label, Elly, is not her first. She first designed an office wear line, "Capri by Audrey", between 2006 and 2008, when she worked as a lawyer in Singapore.

When her husband was posted to London in 2008, she followed, and the label folded in her absence. When her sister began asking her to buy fabrics for her first daughter – she got her second wind – this time for children's clothes. The Elly label was launched in 2010, sold through Pupsik

Studio, an online store, then.

When she returned to Singapore at the end of 2010, she and her sister decided to develop it further so they were often found at weekend fairs and markets the whole of 2011. This, on top of their full-time jobs as lawyers.

"We finally realised that we had to give the business our full attention if we wanted to grow it," she recounts.

So they bit the bullet, quit their jobs, and signed a lease for a shop space at Cluny Court. Soon, they earned the attention of fashionable parents who liked their quirky, unique fabric designs on 100 per cent cotton.

After five years, the sisters have slipped into their roles and the business has become a family affair with their husbands and parents chipping in to help. Their styles are very different – with her elder sister preferring more floral prints and girly designs, while



Ms Ng likes the more "fun" prints. "I'm also the one looking at the accounts and logistics and I leave her to do the display and window dressing, because that's not my forte," she says.

While she does miss her legal career, Ms Ng says design and retail have their own set of challenges so she gets a different satisfaction. "I've learnt a lot about myself because I come across such a wide variety of people. And what is nice is that we've become close friends with our suppliers and fellow retailers because we all share the same type of problems – so we have lots to share."

The question now is how to take their labels to the next level – as some of their main customers – like her sister's two daughters – are growing older themselves. "You could say the business has been tailored for them... my niece is the reason we started Twelve by Elly," quips Ms Ng.

THEN *Teacher*NOW **POET**

## ➔ Marc Nair

by HELMI YUSOF

HE was a popular junior college teacher for five years, making good money before he decided to drop everything and become a full-time poet, writer and spoken word performer. And he hasn't looked back since.

Marc Nair taught General Paper and English Literature from 2007 to 2011 after receiving a Ministry of Education teaching award. But the lifelong lover of words and poetry always felt his destiny lay elsewhere.

"I wanted write creatively. But at that time, the arts landscape was not so developed. So it was harder to strike out as a creative writer – unless you wanted to do copywriting."

The eldest child of a lower middle-class couple grew up loving nursery rhymes which he memorised and recited to his family. But he didn't want to burden his parents by going into the arts immediately upon graduation. So he gave himself five years to hold a stable job, save a good portion of his salary and plan his career switch.

"Sometimes you just have to defer your dreams to make them come true," says the 35-year-old.

By the time he moved out of teaching, he had already published two collections of poetry and made his name in the small spoken word community. He joined Word Forward, a company that organises Poetry Slam, a regular poetry performance event staged around the island.

Under Word Forward, he was appointed the artistic director from 2011 to 2014 of Lit Up Singapore, a multi-disciplinary arts festival, and performed at major literary events. He also represented Singapore in international competitions such as the 2010 World Poetry Slam and the Queensland Poetry Festival.

Subsequently, he started publishing more regularly – one title a year, in fact – and his reputation as a poet, wordsmith and all-round creative rapidly grew. He also founded with his wife Carolyn Oei a culture website called Mackerel ([www.mackerel.life](http://www.mackerel.life)), an important outlet for him as a writer and a photographer.

He knows it's scary to follow your dreams in a competitive city like Singapore, especially when the end goal of those dreams isn't money and wealth. "The speed of success is very much embedded in the Singaporean worker's ethos. It's hard to break out of that. Even in the creative industry, where people need some space to reflect, recalibrate and build good ideas, those demands come up constantly. It's tough to find the equilibrium between being able to do what you want to do and not to worry about money."

Last year, he received the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award for his contributions to literary arts. It is the highest honour a young artist can receive in Singapore – and with it more offers from schools, institutions and government bodies to head literary projects. All these allow Mr Nair to work more closely with his never-ending passion, poetry.

"It's been a very challenging six years. But it's also tremendously exciting. I never know what I'll be doing next."

### Inspired to follow in their footsteps? Here's some advice.

**EDWIN LIM**

"It's important not to get too idealistic, or driven by our dreams. If you get too caught up with one thing – whether it's only making money or only pursuing your passion, then you might not make the best decisions. You'll be taking steps that lean towards your bias. So even if you want to follow your dream, you need to weigh it with different perspectives and make sure it's a balanced assessment before you take the plunge."

**MARC NAIR**

"You have to be very determined. You have to be innovative and resourceful, and constantly look for opportunities for collaboration. And you have to be patient with the process."

**AUDREY NG**

"Entrepreneurs must walk a fine balance between having your eyes on your dreams and your feet on the ground. Have the courage to dream big and at the same time, know that running a business requires realistic and practical (and sometimes small) steps to get there."

**JACLYNN SEAH**

"Start small and start slow. Maybe try a short solo trip nearby to test the waters first, or take a longer unpaid sabbatical first before you make any decisions on quitting your job to travel the world."



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