

Many people dream of long vacations abroad. Some may even dream of dropping out of the rat race to travel the world. But how many people actually act on such dreams? Terence Chan did just that - or at least he did it for 365 days.

"You have to want something so badly that you are willing and able to forsake other things in order to pursue your dream," says Chan.

Chan, who is in his early 40s, is tanned and strongly built. His casual style, sports jacket and sports shoes suggest an outgoing and adventurous personality.

From his office in North Point, he recounts the story of his round-the-

world tour which started in 2007. The idea for the trip did not come suddenly. Chan had spent a year pondering his decision. At the time, the economic meltdown of 2008 was as yet unforeseen and the economy seemed stable. This encouraged Chan to develop his plan for the long journey. After spending five months tying up loose ends at work, Chan quit his job as an ordinary worker in an Information Technology (IT) company where he had worked for seven years.

Although some people would be loathe to risk making a decision at the expense of their income, Chan is nonchalant about the choice he made. "You have to leave your job one day anyway. We should have faith in getting another one after forgoing the present one."

Apart from dealing with his job, there was another even more

important thing Chan had to deal with before he could embark on his journey. He had to get the blessing of his wife.

"It involved wheedling," Chan says, smiling. In order to get his wife's support and permission, he initially halved the duration of the trip when he broached the subject with his wife. It was not until six months after he first told her of his idea, that Chan finally revealed the whole plan to his wife. By then, her response was quite calm.

Nonetheless, Chan admits his wife had felt insecure and worried for his personal safety. "It required a lot of trust on her part to let me go," says Chan.

The couple first met at church more than a decade ago and they got married in 2001. Chan attributes the support from his wife largely to the couple's knowledge and mutual understanding of each other's personalities, which make it easier for them to make compromises.

Chan's extraordinary journey began on July 10, 2007 and came to an end on July 9 the following year. He visited a total of 43 countries, spending more than HK\$230,000.

While he was on the road, Chan maintained contact with his wife

mainly through emails. The couple did manage to meet during Chan's trip in Spain, four months after he had set off. Chan says those eight days he spent with his wife were the most extravagant of the trip. Rather than staying in hostels and eating at fast-food chains as he did when he was on his own, Chan stayed with his wife at better hotels and dined in restaurants with better service. He says he spent around €100 per night for accommodation per night with his wife compared with a total daily expenditure of no more than €30 when he was on his own.

**"It is an attempt to advance oneself by doing something different."**

Nearly two years after his journey was completed, Chan still gets a lot of satisfaction out of the experience. During his visit to South Africa, he befriended a German at a hostel and they spent several days exploring the country together. Even now, the two are still friends.

Of all the places Chan has visited, Mexico is his favourite because of the hospitality of Mexicans. Unlike in other developing countries, such as Myanmar and Morocco where the locals will hassle tourists for money, Chan says Mexicans are friendly



Chan and his wife arranged to meet in Spain during his year-long trip.



Chan had a wonderful time in Cape Town, South Africa.

and helpful. Chan also found similarities between Mexico and China, in that both countries have many diverse cultures in different regions within their borders. The costumes, food and festivals found in the eastern and the southern parts are distinct. He also loved the history, heritage, museums, sightseeing spots and primal forests he found in the country.

As for the most moving moment, Chan points to his arrival in Moscow on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Although he spent a tough five to six days on the train, it was worth every minute to be able to realise his dream of crossing between Asia and Europe overland. "It is an attempt to advance oneself by doing something different. And it looks cool," Chan says proudly. "I also got new and different experiences to share with others."

However, not everything on the unforgettable journey was pleasant. Chan was bored during his stay in Belarus where he says there was a lack of interesting places to explore. But even more off-putting was the hostility towards foreigners he detected in the

locals. The drunkards he saw on the streets, and the news reports he had read about racism towards Asians added to his overall feeling of uneasiness while he was in the country.

Even the police in Belarus made him feel uneasy. Chan says that while police in Hong Kong may make you feel they are protecting the innocent, the same cannot be said in Belarus. "It is even more threatening to have police stationed on streets." He says that corruption is rampant among members of the Belarus police force who may even blackmail tourists.

Chan recalls that one night at about 11 p.m. near a train station in Yekaterinburg, he was approached by a policeman and asked to show his passport which was later taken to the police station. He was then asked to pay in order to get it back. After rounds of bargaining, Chan finally got away by paying about HK\$230.

Leaving the danger zone was not the end of Chan's troubles. Constantly being on the move began to wear down his spirits. The change in the entire environment when crossing borders

## A *baggage-free* journey by To Ting



## “It makes me further realise that nothing matters so much that I can’t let go.”

rendered Chan a stranger again and again. “I had to pick up things from scratch,” says Chan. “All such things as trivial as toilets, take time to adapt to.” There were practical problems, such as the occasions when Chan could not find the money-changers and hostels or shops where he could change money were all closed.

Moreover, Chan says that getting tickets at the right time was never an easy job as peak hours for tickets in every country varied and he had to compete for tickets from time to time. The language barriers also made communication with station staff difficult, making him feel frustrated and melancholy.

“The more frequently you take a trip, the more demanding it becomes on all the resources you have.” Chan says it is understandable that you get moody sometimes during a journey. At such times, he tried to deal with it by staying in a place, such as a hostel, to give himself time to calm down and relax.

Apart from learning to be alone, Chan says he also learned the importance of being decisive because of the sudden challenges he encountered during the journey.

“Sometimes you need to make a decision in a very short time and are not allowed to think for too long.”


He recalls his experience in Venice where he could not find suitable accommodation. He had to decide whether to leave for another destination immediately and if so, where it would be, how he would get there and how his route would have to be changed. In the end, after a few hours of sightseeing in Venice, Chan left for Palermo.

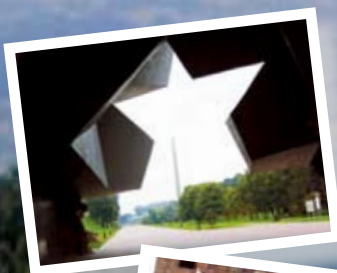
Chan now works as an operation manager in the Hong Kong Handbell Academy run by his wife, Emily Li Kit-yiu, to promote the art of handbell ringing in Hong Kong. Last year, he published a book recording the precious memories of his grand tour.

Chan regards his year-long round-the-globe trip as a “crazy” experience compared to others he has had over the past 20 years.

“Usually I go abroad twice or three times a year for a few days each time,” he says. Chan adds that people usually travel around for no more than 20 days at most, there are not many who would undertake a year-long trip away from home like his. Reflecting on the

wandering experience, Chan says: “It makes me further realise that nothing matters so much that I can’t let go.”

Chan is still keen on travelling but, at present, he has no plans for another long tour. He went to the Philippines with his wife and friends to see whales and sharks during the last Chinese New Year holiday. He also dives a few times a year. It seems that Chan is on one adventurous lifelong journey. 



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Chan says that staying in Belarus made him feel tense.

Chan regards Mexico as culturally diversified.