



MP Josephine Teo in Tibet

Lessons from the world

By TY Wong

When MP Josephine Teo completed her postgraduate studies in London in 1992, she slung on a backpack and took a train – the Trans-Siberian Railway — through Russia to Mongolia.

She hasn't stopped traveling since. Over the years, the 39-year-old director of human resource at NTUC has visited a host of places, among them India, China and Tibet.

It helps that her husband, civil servant Teo Eng Cheong, shares her interest in travel and adventure.

Asked which country has made the greatest impression on her, she says: "That's a very tough question. I can find something to tell you about every place I've been to. But I would say South Africa."

She visited it in 1997 and found that "the landscape is stunning and the infrastructure pretty good for tourism". Safety, though, was an issue.

For instance, when she wanted to leave her lodgings, someone would drive them around. Her little "hotel" was surrounded by high walls, topped with barbed wire, just like that of her landlord's neighbours.

"It showed me how you can have all this beauty around and not have the freedom to enjoy it because of security issues."

She adds: "Our freedom here is priceless, and we don't know it until we lose it."

Having children did not put the brakes on her travels, although it has restricted the kind of countries visited.

She says: "Since the kids came, my husband and I have only been on one adventure, to Tibet."

However, the couple and their twin daughters who are now seven, and their son, nine, have gone on a driving holiday in France, holidayed in Yunnan province in China, and visited Japan, among other places.

She says of the French trip in 2004: "One thing I like about driving holidays is that you can stop the car and have a picnic while the kids run around. You can also get to tour the sites."

Her husband, however, had to wrestle with driving a manual MPV with a left-hand drive, as well as trying to figure out the road signs in French.

"Still, we had a great holiday".

When she travels with her children, they usually each carry a notebook, in which they either write or draw something about what they have done that day. They may also paste in their little "journals" photos of the places they visited, cutting these out of brochures.

"I find that when they look back, they remember more. It helps them to process the experience – they have to think about whether or not they enjoyed it and what they liked about it. It helps to leave a stronger impression on them."

She added: "It also gives me the opportunity to tell them a little bit more about the sites we visited."

They usually do their journaling and play card games after dinner to wind down.

On her other great interest, Mrs Teo who says ruefully that she now spends too little time

reading, revealed she considers books like "Economics Explained" by Robert L. Heilbroner and Lester Thurow, and "The Future of Freedom" by Fareed Zakaria interesting.

But, she added: "I read fiction when I'm on holiday."

While vacationing in Kunming last year, she read *The Kite Runner*, about an Afghan boy whose life changed after the war.

With an unapologetic laugh, she said: "It was a tear jerker. I enjoyed having a big cry."

