

# Wanderlust

Last year, twenty-somethings Lois Yasay and Chichi Bacolod — co-founders of the travel blog [www.wearesolesisters.com](http://www.wearesolesisters.com) — decided to quit their day jobs to make serious traveling their business.

Here's what happened. Story by Lois Yasay

**MOST PEOPLE MAKE** a hobby out of traveling; last year, my friend Chichi and I decided to make it our lives. I was working as a financial services trainer for a foreign bank when I stopped seeing travel as a once-a-month, do-it-on-the-weekend sort of thing. I had traveled to Thailand for the Songkran Festival in 2010, the first country in South-East Asia I had ever visited, and for the first time it became apparent to me how different the Philippines was from its neighbors. In fact, because of our Spanish heritage and Catholic values, we're the odd one out. So I became curious about our neighbors and was eager to see how they lived.

Then I met Chichi, my colleague at the bank, in whom I immediately saw the same longing and passion for travel. We drew up a *30 Before 30* list of things we wanted to do before we turned the big 3-0, such as #13, swim with the gentle whale sharks (*butandings*) in Sorsogon and, #29, appear in a travel show. We called ourselves Sole Sisters, and put our list up online as a travelogue called [www.wearesolesisters.com](http://www.wearesolesisters.com). We soon got great response from people who also wanted the same things: freedom, travel and adventure.

In order to accomplish most of the items on our to-do list, we had to take a major life-changing step: we quit our jobs so we could travel for as long as our escape fund would allow. It took us a whole year to plan our route and save up for what we would need for six months of traveling on the cheap — PHP100,000 each.

My father was worried about my safety and concerned about everything in my life that would be put on hold (read: my career, future marriage then maybe motherhood). But I'm less fearful of something happening to me than of nothing ever happening. I'm more afraid of a life where nothing extraordinary ever happens.

So in early 2011, we stuffed clothes and toiletries into a 45L NorthFace backpack — light fabric clothes, bikinis, flip-flops, sarongs, scarves, snoods, and a tiny pink hairdryer (Chichi's call, because you never know when you have to show up with great hair).



And we're off! That's me, Lois (at left) and Chichi.

Bangkok's floating market, where we would load up on fresh fruit, is also a visual feast.

PHOTO GETTY IMAGES (MAIN PIC)



Clockwise from left: The future looks so bright at Bangkok's dazzling temples; a monk surveys the mystical landscape of Bagan, Myanmar; a parade of boats in Ha Long Bay, two to three hours out of Hanoi.

March 2011  
Singapore

I had the chance to fly ahead of Chichi, who had to stay in Manila longer to finish up work. So I spent a week in India before meeting up with her in Singapore. A cup of coffee at a local kopi tiam, or coffee shop, marked the beginning of our South-East Asian adventure.

March 12, 2011  
Weaving through Vietnam

Chichi and I land in Ho Chi Minh City to start the official leg of our South-East Asian jaunt. Our heads started spinning after seeing endless stalls selling custom-made suits, shoes, bags and scarves — almost anything you could think of. Crossing the street amidst a sea of smog and speeding motorbikes was a thrilling feat. Thanks to the roaring herds of two-wheeled vehicles crowding the city's streets, it can get pretty dusty in HCMC; so if you're planning a trip to Asia's motorbike capital, go prepared. We brought along a nifty item called Headware — a versatile piece of fabric that can turn to a face mask, a hair band and even a tube top!

Vietnamese food was a daily feast of fresh vegetables and steaming soups. We gorged on *pho* noodles and French baguettes filled with paté, cilantro, tofu and pickles. We got hooked on *ca phe su nam*, their rich traditional coffee.

Our excitement was magnified even more when we got to Hanoi. We were able to tick off another item on our *30 Before 30* list: #24, board a junk and experience Ha Long Bay for the first time. Getting on a ship and staring at an emerald sea against a backdrop of limestone pillars was a dream come true for us. It was one of the most surreal landscapes we'd ever seen.

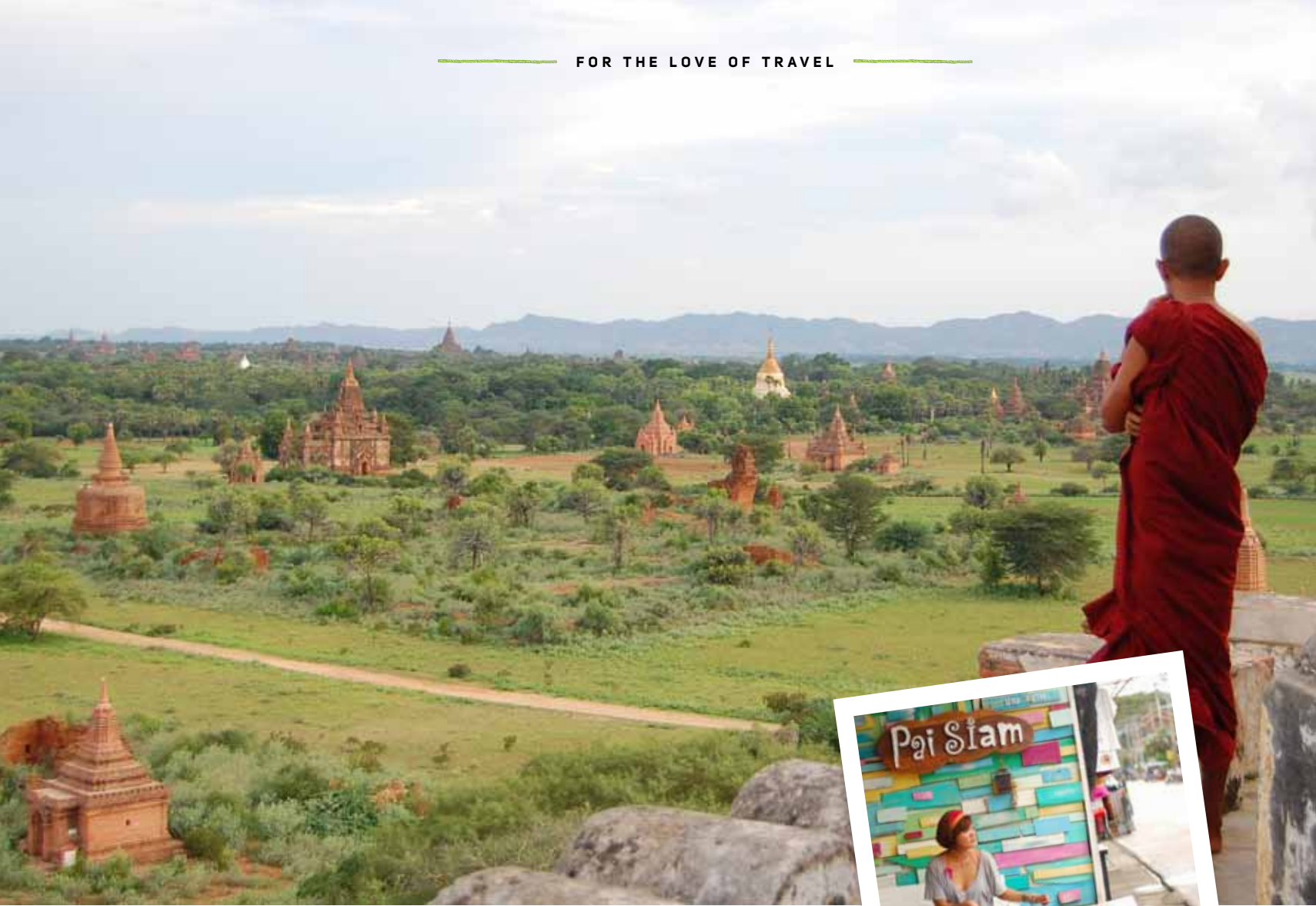


April 19, 2011  
Lazing in Laos

Our pace slowed down as soon as we got to Laos — we couldn't help it. We took a bus through dusty, almost non-existent roads and sleepy towns. The charm of this place is that it chose to shun modernity completely. This country is also one of the poorest we have seen so far. But everywhere we went, we were greeted by friendly smiles and waves. The people had very little and probably have never left their town, but they were the happiest bunch we've ever met.

May 6, 2011  
Thailand's shopping mecca

Three months into our trip, we found ourselves at the backpacker's shangri-la of Bangkok: Khao San Road. In our first few days in Bangkok, we did



what every girl does in this bustling city — shop! We spent an entire day at the one of the world's biggest outdoor markets, the Chatuchak weekend market, perusing the overwhelming selection of clothes, accessories and even houseware.

In the end, remembering our code of mindful spending (we still had a way to go, after all), our self-control won over and we contented ourselves with buying a dress each for less than US\$5.

June 10, 2011  
Magical Myanmar

We met a group of merry couch surfers in Thailand and decided at the last minute to join them in Myanmar. This country is probably the farthest we could ever get away from the familiarity of South-East Asia while still in the region. We witnessed over a thousand red-robed monks collecting alms in



Earth to Chichi! But yeah, the sights are mesmerizing



The Headware piece that kept my face dust-free



Indonesia offers endless possibilities — from the big city life in Jakarta, to the quiet charm of the Gili Islands in Lombok, to the culturally rich haven of Ubud and Bali (where we donned bikinis and learned how to surf!)



Can you tell we're so glad we quit our day jobs?

Mandalay, and crossed over the world's longest teak bridge in Amapura. We watched the sun rise over the green landscape of Bagan, sprinkled with red and white from the surrounding temples. Myanmar opened our eyes to a part of the world we never knew existed.

**July 5, 2011**

### Last stop: Indonesia

Time goes by so quickly especially when you're traveling. As the six months came to a close, we chose to spend the remaining weeks in Indonesia where we took a vacation from our vacation. We swam off the Gili islands in Lombok, took surf lessons in Bali, and relaxed amidst the lush green scenery and temples of Ubud.

At this point we had found a travel rhythm that we were both comfortable with. We started caring less about how we looked in photos and paid more attention to the entire travel experience — the people we met, the snippets of foreign languages we'd learned, and the sense of wonder that each place elicited from us.

**January 6, 2012**

### At home in the Philippines

I've been back in Manila for seven months now, and I smile at the magic of travel and how it has transformed our lives in a big way. The trip also helped define our travel philosophy — a code of conduct that allows us to make the

most out of every experience. When it comes to packing, if you can fit your entire life in a backpack in less than an hour, then you know you have only the essentials. When we wanted to buy something, our main consideration was "Can I still carry it on my back?" So we've learned to detach ourselves from things, and to value the experiences more than the souvenirs.

Traveling has also allowed us to focus on the here and the now — something we hardly do when we're back home. We don't zone out even while sitting in a bus or going for a walk. We have to experience everything. That also means ignoring our fears while traveling, and being free to just take in what the world has to offer. For every day that we were traveling, life was exactly the way we wanted it to be. Incidentally, item #11 on our 30 Before 30 list is to get a photograph/ article published in a travel magazine." This piece in our favorite inflight magazine finally lets us a tick that item off the list. 🍷

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