Having fun going places

Lavinia Tan, 24, intrepid traveller

WHEN Ms Lavinia Tan got knocked out of the semi-finals to be the Asian host of Discovery Travel And Living channel's popular Globe Trekker series two years ago, she wanted to "crawl into a hole".

"I must have spent a whole month wondering what I could have done differently, or cleverer things I could have said," says the 24-year-old, a big fan of travel shows.

A month later, she got a phone call that put her dream back on track. She was one of two "wild cards" recalled into the competition. Against such odds, she never figured she could win.

She got a second phone call, telling her to apply for a visa and pack her bags. She was off to Florida and the Bahamas as the channel's only Asian show host, after beating thousands of contenders from all over the region.

She took a semester off her marketing and law course at Singapore Management University and headed to Phuket to get her diving certification in just five days, before taking off for the ride of her life.

Over the last two years, she has filmed in five different locations, including Malaysia, Hongkong and the Bahamas.

"This is something I really wanted to do. Fortunately, I have a boss who realises travel hosting is a once-in-a-lifetime experience," says Ms Tan, who now works for advertising agency Bates Asia and is allowed to go on leave whenever she needs to do filming.

The travel bug hit her early on. While she was growing up, her divorced mum Evelyn Neo, 61, who does freelance marketing communications work, took her and her sister, 28-year-old sales executive Melissa, for holidays in the region since money was tight.

"She always made us try new things... water-skiing, strange and new food. Nothing is daunting to me," says Ms Tan, who lives in a five-room HDB flat in Kemban with her mother, 82-year-old grandmother Jeanette Ong, and three male cats "to balance out the oestrogen".

At Singapore Chinese Girls' School and Anglo Chinese Junior College, the gungho girl was with the National Cadet Corps and later the Girl Guides. She even bagged a President's Guide Award at the age of 17.

This gave her an edge when filming for Globe Trekker, since she was game to do anything thrown at her. Well, except bungee jumping. "Afraid of heights," she says with a laugh.

The ultimate adventure to cap it all for this aspiring Ian Wright, the original Globe Trekker host, would be a trip to Africa. "That would really take me out of my comfort zone," she muses.