

Meeting Miss Muffet

From working in London's IT industry to making cakes in Singapore: it's been quite the career change for ANITA CHUGHTAI. We sat down beside her for a chat...

Expats find themselves in places they'd never dreamed of. It can seem random at the time, and uprooting and moving is often done without a lot of thought. But, it usually throws up new opportunities and experiences – not just for the breadwinner but for the whole family.

Here, Anita describes her journey of becoming an expat living in Singapore, and how she has developed her new career around what she loves.



Tell us a bit about your background and how you came to be in Singapore.

I'm a British Pakistani who has lived in Singapore for nine years. I'm married to an American Bengali, so our three kids are terribly confused – and the one born here believed he was Chinese for the longest time. Apparently, China was his favorite country – but he's never been there. I understand where that comes from though, as I love and collect teapots but I don't drink tea. Totally random!

We lived in Central London for 12 years and were thinking of moving somewhere suburban, like Putney (if you know London, you'll know that that is not very suburban at all...). Our older two were four and two, and I felt that they needed some more space. We didn't feel like the suburbs were for us, so I just said: "Let's have an Asian adventure!"

The timing couldn't have been better. Just a few months later, my husband was asked to relocate to Singapore to expand his business line to Asia. He moved first and let me wrap up our UK lives, at which point I decided that my new hobby would be refurbishing antique furniture into funky new pieces (great timing!). So, between parenting two young boys, running a luxury cake business and embarking on an antique furniture re-vamp obsession, I arrived in Singapore having never been here before. It was a complete reset.

Where did your love of baking begin?

I always loved cakes. I remember making a fuss in a bookshop when I was about seven because I wanted to buy a cookbook that had fairy cakes in it. My mum really didn't want to buy it for me – she thought it was just a fad. But I still have that book nearly 40 years later.

I loved the feeling that baking gave me. The comforting smell of vanilla that engulfed our home, the soft delicate sponge and – at that time – the sweet glacé icing that I used to drip over the top. Then my grandmother bought me a cake-decorating book; it showed me the possibilities and I was hooked.

Have you always wanted to pursue a career in baking?

I didn't expect cake design to be my career. I loved maths, I studied Drama at college, I graduated with a film studies degree, and I ended up working in IT – as you do! I loved my job, first as a desktop engineer, and then managing teams of engineers who supported servers around the country. I never stopped studying, and IT was my life and passion. My colleagues from that time have a hard time fitting together the corporate, no-nonsense "me" of back then to today's luxury cake artist with three kids.

I stumbled on this career when I couldn't find anyone with the creative expertise to make the cake I wanted for my middle child's first birthday. I designed and created it myself. From then

on, through word of mouth, every week I had someone asking me to make their birthday cake. I soon realised I was a fresh pair of eyes in a crowded marketplace, and since then it has been small but meaningful steps in this direction.

The most memorable part of a party is the cake cutting, the blowing of the candles, the wish making, the attention towards the person celebrating. It's the time when everything stops and everyone is focussed on one point. I saw that what was on offer didn't reflect the importance of that moment. So I set out to change it.

Where did you learn to bake?

At home in my mum's kitchen, through trial and error, by reading books, and, more recently, through YouTube. The baking part was just "in me". It's the designing and decorating that I have learnt over time.

What's the most satisfying thing about your work?

My clients – helping them make memories and seeing their precious moments around their cake with their family and friends. It's a huge win when I create a cake that a client didn't even know they wanted themselves – cakes that they and their guests remember for years. There's that moment of awe when they see their cake, and the surprise when it's above and beyond anything they dreamt of.

Food is such an engulfing experience, it touches each of our senses; creating flavours that burst on the tongue is the most important thing and the basis of everything I create. I often receive texts from people years afterwards saying people are still talking about the cake I created for them.

And the biggest challenges?

A huge challenge for me was creating my brand. It came with a lot of soul searching: Who am I? What do I believe in? What is my voice? I thought I knew the answers, but when the future is riding on those questions, you can get thrown off the path – you need to re-evaluate.

So, who was I really? – not in the sense of how I wanted my brand to be seen, but to be true to myself and the brand I was making. It took months of conversations with friends and family to get to the eye of the storm, and I finally had a vision for Miss Muffet – The Unique Cake Boutique. I wanted it to be synonymous with quality and delight – to make sure that anyone who came in contact with my brand felt immediately comfortable with the decision to work with me, and for each client to have a feeling of delight when they collected, tasted and remembered their beautiful, edgy and delicious cake. *æ*

To see more of Anita's amazing cakes, visit missmuffetcakeboutique.com and follow her on Instagram @missmuffetcakeboutique; or, to get in touch, email anita@missmuffetcakeboutique.com