

# Barfing stock

Chen Ying Hao is such a fan of air-sickness bags, he pretends to be sick to get more of them

nicholas yong

Most travellers on a long flight occupy themselves by flipping through the entertainment channels or wondering what will be served for the in-flight meal. Others might be content to just relax.

Not so in the case of medical representative Chen Ying Hao. The first thing the 27-year-old checks out is the vomit bags in the seat pockets in front of him.

This curious priority of his has nothing to do with motion sickness or a fear of flying.

He is a collector of barf bags. Over the course of almost 10 years, he has amassed a collection of 388 bags.

From the ubiquitous Singapore Airlines one to those on board Yemenia Airway and Uzbekistan Airways, the collection spans 186 airlines from 81 countries.

The bags are kept in transparent folder slips and stowed in alphabetical order in white plastic Ikea boxes, complete with dehumidifiers to prevent mould.

On why he collects such innocuous objects, he says: "Every airline has different bags. The designs are unique. Some are colourful while others are generic. You can also see the history of the airline as the bags change over the years in terms of their branding and design."

He started a personal website last year, [www.airsicknessbags.sg](http://www.airsicknessbags.sg), showing off his collection and detailing its history.

"I printed a namecard for the website just for laughs and I give it to new friends. It is a very good topic to start a conversation with," he says.

His fascination with the sick sack began in 2001, during a junior college trip to Nepal on a Royal Nepal Airlines flight for a community improvement programme. With "too much time at hand", he stumbled upon what would be the first



bag of his collection. Mr Chen, who has two siblings, says: "My elder brother collects stamps but I wanted to collect something that no one else would even think of collecting."

While he travels only two to three times a year, his collection soon grew as he got friends and family to pretend to be air-sick to get as many bags as possible for him when they travelled.

During a flight to Myanmar on Yangon Airlines last year, he recalls "raiding" unoccupied and vacated seats for bags with a friend after the plane had landed.

"When I ask the cabin crew for bags, most of the time, they give me funny looks. But I just pretend I am not feeling well or my friend is sick," he says with a chuckle.

There is a reason for accumulating extra bags.

Mr Chen had assumed that he was the only one with this quirky pastime, as he



**Sick (bag) dream:** Mr Chen Ying Hao (above) hopes to exhibit his collection of airline vomit bags one day. It includes the six designs by Singapore Airlines (left). ST PHOTOS: CAROLINE CHIA

had never met another collector here. Then he went online and discovered an international community of similar collectors, or baggists, who actively trade and buy surplus bags from one another.

He has exchanged bags via snail mail with collectors as far afield as Norway and Germany. He has also bought the occasional bag from eBay.

The common ones go for as little as US\$1 (\$1.37) while rare bags, especially from airlines that are no longer in existence, can fetch hundreds of dollars.

Of-coveted bags include those from Air Force One and Nasa spaceships. He once paid €20 (\$39) for a bag from Russian airline Aeroflot.

His website is also a means of reaching out to other collectors and advertising his wishlist of bags. According to an unofficial global ranking of collectors at [www.bagophily.com](http://www.bagophily.com), a website started by three European collectors, Mr Chen currently stands at No. 39 in the world.

With the help of friends both near and far, though, his collection is set to grow.

He dreams of exhibiting his collection one day or becoming the world record-holder for the largest vomit bag collection. He still has a way to go - Dutchman Niek Vermeulen holds the current record with 5,468 bags from more than 1,000 airlines, as at March 2008.

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## root awakening Palms need some sun

**The leaves of a palm I got at a garden sale have turned brown. What is the problem?**

Palms are best grown in a semi-shaded location.

Most "indoor palms" are best grown in places such as the balcony or corridor where they can get at least six hours of filtered sunshine daily.

If you are growing the palm deep indoors, rotate it with another plant in a brighter location so that it will get sufficient sunshine.

When transplanting, avoid disturbing the root ball too much to prevent excessive damage to the roots and cause the plant to experience transplant shock.

Grow newly transplanted plants in a shady area protected from excessive winds for at least a week to aid recovery.

**write in**

Send gardening queries to [stlife@sph.com.sg](mailto:stlife@sph.com.sg)

**How do I get a Misai Kuching**

**plant to bloom more?** Also known as the cat's whiskers plant, the Misai Kuching is a sun-loving plant. It grows best in a sunny area with at least six hours of direct sunshine.

After flowering, prune the plant a little - this seems to promote the production of new flowers.

Next, feed it with a fertiliser for flowering plants. Avoid giving fertiliser rich in only nitrogen as it promotes the production of leaves over flowers.

The answers are by Mr Wilson Wong, founder of Green Culture Singapore ([www.greenculturesg.com](http://www.greenculturesg.com)), a website for plant lovers.

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