

Business Profile

Tips & tricks from those in the know

Buena vida

The Finder Singapore caught up with the director of **LAS LILAS SCHOOL**, Estefanía Peral Iglesias, and the school's business development manager, Mónica Hortelano López, to find out how these two highly educated Spanish women forged a successful career in Singapore in the field of language learning.

ESTEFANÍA PERAL IGLESIAS landed in Singapore in October 2003. She was recently married, had quit her job in Spain and decided to explore Asia. "Singapore was the first destination we arrived in, and although we were open to travel to other Asian countries, more than 10 years later we are still both here – although we are now divorced, we remain good friends." When Estefanía first arrived in Singapore, she worked for almost two years as a correspondent for the Spanish news agency EFE and was teaching Spanish as an adjunct lecturer at Ngee Ann Polytechnic. It was during this period, and after a thorough evaluation of the possibilities of teaching Spanish in the Singaporean market, when the project of *Las Lilas School* was born, the first Spanish school here in Singapore.

The school officially opened in July 2005 and very soon became the point of reference for Spanish learning and a beacon for the Spanish community living and working in Singapore. Two years after the opening of *Las Lilas*, the school became the first Associated Center to Instituto Cervantes (Spain's official language and culture organisation) and the accredited examination center for the official DELE Exams (Official Certificates in Spanish as a Foreign Language).

On the education front Estefanía holds a Bachelor's Degree in History and Geography and a Postgraduate Certification in Education from the University of Barcelona, Spain. She also earned a diploma in teaching E/LE (Spanish as a Foreign Language) from both International House Barcelona and Universitat de Barcelona. And she is proud of how she has been able to pass on her learning to so many others. "In the past nine years we have delivered tens of thousands of tuition hours to young children (as young as two years of age), adolescents and adults at *Las Lilas School*. We work with companies across multiple segments, including banking and finance, trade, mining, retail, media, IT and travel, to name just a few. *Las Lilas School* has also established a fruitful, sustained relationship with a number of academic institutions (universities and both local and international schools) as well as with Singapore government bodies. We therefore hold a track record with a large number of patrons who can speak of the quality of our services, and I am extremely proud of this achievement."

In August 2009 *Las Lilas* helped Stamford American International School (SAIS) set up its Spanish department, which Estefanía personally managed and where she continues to work. Her children

now attend SAIS, but she will soon be returning to her main focus – *Las Lilas*. "This is my fifth and last year combining my job as a teacher at SAIS with my role as director at *Las Lilas*. Working with SAIS has been a great experience that has allowed me to grow enormously both personally and professionally. It has helped me to gain a different perspective for the field of education and realise the importance of lifelong learning and innovation.

Five years ago, **MÓNICA HORTELANO LÓPEZ**, now the business development manager at *Las Lilas School*, had a few days off in Spain and decided to visit Singapore for holidays and catch up with friends here. Marina Bay Sands was still under construction. "Singapore was a sea of cranes – a good indication of a strong economy." Monica thought if one day she was to live in Asia, it would have to be in Singapore. "I lived in a number of European countries, learning languages and immersing myself in the cultures, and for many years after my studies I worked for different companies and sectors, was a member of a number of boards of directors and gained practical international work experience. But most importantly, I was passionate for travelling and doing business globally, a passion that has resulted in a broad international knowledge, not only for the industrial or business trends but also awareness for the cultural landscape from country to country." Four years after her first trip to Singapore, Monica landed back in the Lion City and set up her own company. "I studied economics at university and was awarded an MBA. I was equipped to build business ties here in Asia. I worked from Singapore for Spanish companies wanting to reach out to new markets, possibly set up

a company in Singapore or develop a business strategy here in Asia. I love Spain but I am very happy in Singapore as I love to work with Spanish companies in this part of the world. Singapore is a great city and, for other countries, a window to the Asian region.

Monica met Estefanía through her circle of friends here in Singapore. She wanted to organise a business training seminar in Singapore for Spanish companies and immediately thought of *Las Lilas* as the perfect place to hold such an event. She and Monica easily forged a friendship and, after some collaboration, Monica became the business development manager for *Las Lilas*. The rest, as they say, is history.

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