

Journey of an Environmental Science Communicator

written by Saarani Vengadesen | 19/03/2021

A high-spirited STEM graduate Attleth Don Peris, emerged as an environmental science communicator after being crowned as Champion for FameLab Malaysia Competition 2020. Don being a thalassophile (ocean lover) enjoys his current role to the core as a Programme Manager for sustainable tourism in Reef Check Malaysia, Mersing, Johor. His job is about striking a balance between tourism business and environment conservation.

He found the marine industry specifically nautical science very appealing after being inspired by his English teacher back in high school.

“Her husband was a ship captain who travels around the world. I was fascinated by the line of work and travelling lifestyle”, said Don.

Unfortunately, after his matriculation he mistakenly applied for marine science instead of nautical science assuming both the courses are similar.

“I was determined to change my course initially but ended up falling in love with this field where I still get to travel, and also do research to understand our ocean better”, said the enthusiastic environmentalist.

Here is a short interview with him.

esti.my: What was the turning point in your career?

Don: My curiosity towards ocean guided me to further my Masters in Oceanography at University Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and the turning point of my career path took place at UMT. I spent almost four years for my research to do my lab work, field trips and got into the mud to collect data. While doing my thesis my inner voice asked me who is going to read my thesis, how much limelight will my research get and what is the significance of my discovery. That was when I had the calling to communicate my work to a wider audience. This led me to take part in FameLab 2020, the longest running science communication competition globally and became the national champion.

esti.my: What was your topic for FameLab?

Don: Contestants have to win over the audiences’ and judges’ in three minutes, presenting any topic in science. I chose mangrove forest titled ‘Save our Homes by Saving our Mangroves’. ‘Mangrove forests form a dense barrier along our coasts and become our first line of defence against natural disasters such as tsunamis as they absorb and reduce impact, saving lives and homes. I firmly believe that everyone can play a role in conservation of mangrove swamp.

esti.my: Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Don: My interest and experiences changed so much in the past 10 years. Initially, interested in marine, then environmental research, tourism industry, and now sustainable conservation and tourism. However, I always loved interdisciplinary collaboration and public engagement. In 10 years, I see myself building public presence through science communication and raising awareness regarding environmental issues and how we could all do our part to help. I also see

myself providing my expertise to organisations that seek for policy and management change that are more environmentally sustainable.

esti.my: What is your message to youth?

Don: When I was in high school, my teacher told me that we are leaders of the future. But I tell the youth now, that you are all the leaders of the present. There is no better time to be a leader other than right now, especially when technology is making information so accessible and people are brought closer to each other to learn from each other. So, keep enriching your knowledge and choose your passion and a cause to champion.