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Just rent and save



Mr Chiyarath Chandran Sajeevkumar (in car) rents the car during some weekends from Mr Anthony Toh and his wife Jean Ling, seen here with their daughter Reyko Toh.

Benson Ang

The Straits Times

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Why buy? These days, consumers are renting and sharing items instead.

From household tools to cars, toys to maternity clothes, chances are someone out there is willing to rent, or even give away, the item you need.

Owners say they want to get rid of pre-loved items or make some cash from them, and there are plenty of takers who want to save money.

Of course, it reduces wastage and helps save the environment too.

This "sharing economy" is said to have started in the mid-2000s and Airbnb, an online accommodation rental service, is a prime success story.

The Economist reported last year that more than 4 million people have used Airbnb since its launch in 2008.

The service sees home owners renting out their spare rooms or homes for a fee that is often considerably less than the cost of a hotel stay.

In Singapore, at least four new platforms that facilitate the sharing and renting of items have started in recent years. For example, Leendy is a mobile app that helps users exchange items with one another. It was launched in May last year with 100 users. The figure has since grown to about 1,500 people, who trade items such as books and computer games.

Its creator, Mr Ryan Tan, 27, says: "I wanted to give unused things around the house a second life. For instance, a person uses an electric drill for only about 15 minutes in his lifetime, so why not share it with others?"

Rent Tycoons, an online portal that lets people rent their items, has seen its number of users grow from 10 in 2012 to more than 2,500 now.

Ms Fenni Wang, 28, its co-founder, says: "Many of our owners have rented out their items so often that they've covered the cost of these items."

iCarsclub, a peer-to-peer car sharing scheme, started in December 2012. It has a pool of 250 active car owners who have registered their vehicles for rental.

One owner, Ms Jean Ling, 37, has been putting her nine-year-old Mitsubishi Lancer up for rent on weekends since last December. The project administrator in a bank makes \$100 to \$400 a month in rental fees.

She says: "My husband has another car which we use on weekends. Instead of leaving this car unused, we thought why not rent it out and make some money?"

Her only complaint so far is that some people dirty her car, leaving footprints and popcorn on the seats.

"But I also get nice text messages from some saying I have a 'good car'," she adds. "These always make my day."

Mr Chiyarath Chandran Sajeevkumar, 43, an enterprise architect who does not own a car, has rented Ms Ling's car twice - in March and last month.

He uses it to drive his 10-year-old daughter to school for her co-curricular activities and to go grocery shopping in Little India. He pays up to \$80 each time for renting the car for a full day.

"Some vegetables are sold only in Little India and I need a way to transport them home," says the father of two, who lives in Sengkang. "Cabs are expensive and you can never get one when you need it. Renting a car makes sense since I don't need it on weekdays."

Ms Cindy Tan, 33, has been renting toys from toy rental store Singapore Toy Rental for the last 11/2 years.

The assistant marketing manager, who has a two-year-old daughter Kylie and a two-month-old son Jonas, says: "Our four-room flat is only 90 sq m. We don't want to have toys lying around after our kids grow up."

Her husband, businessman Jason Lim, 33, adds: "You'd be surprised how quickly kids get bored and dump their toys. When this happens, we just rent a new one."

Renting toys saves them money too. The Scramble N Slide Play Center by Grow'n up, which the family has rented since March for \$68 a month, would have cost \$299.95.

The play set features a slide, swing and crawling spaces.

"As we rent each toy for at most two months, it's cheaper than buying," Ms Tan says. She spends about \$130 on toy rentals each month.

Hygiene is not an issue, she adds, as all the toys are disinfected by the store before they are delivered.

"I'll just avoid renting items with cushions as bacteria can grow easily in fabrics."

If you are lucky, you might even meet kind souls who will happily give you their used items.

Ms Thng Wen You, 27, a senior executive at a local university, is looking to give away a Vivitar digital camera and a clothes steamer which she bought a few years ago for \$230 and \$129 respectively.

She offered the items last week on the Singapore Freecycle Network, an online group hosted on Yahoo! Groups. So far, no one has asked to collect the items.

Ms Thng, who has also given away clothes, books and a chair, says: "I do not need the items anymore but they are still in good condition. It'd be a pity to throw them away.

"It's also nice to know that someone out there will benefit from items which I no longer have use for."