

Meet Vinuri Silva

What do you do?

I'm a PhD* candidate/researcher/scientist at the University of Adelaide. My background is in marine biology and I research the bacteria that grow on marine plastics. I work on better understanding different impacts caused by plastic pollution in our oceans.

I also enjoy communicating STEM, I do this through Arludo where I work a Science communicator to teach students science. I am also about to start working with the Australian Space Agency, within the Space Discovery Centre as a space communicator after I finish my PhD.

*A PhD candidate is like a really advanced student at university who studies one topic they love for a long time, and when they're finished, they've become an expert.



How did you get into that job?

I was never at the top of the class because I didn't care that much for studies in school, I was more focused on sports or spending time with friends. When I went to university to study my Bachelor of Science, I wasn't as distracted, but still didn't give my full 100%.

For my honours research year, I had to pick a topic of research, and the topic of plastic pollution grabbed my attention because I have first-hand seen how bad it is in some countries I have travelled to. So I started my honours research by looking at microplastics in fish. This research hooked me on to the topic because I soon understood the large amount of unknowns about plastic pollution. My honours research year was when I started to understand my full capabilities.

Once I was finished, I wanted to keep going and find more answers about plastic pollution. I then decided to start a PhD researching the bacteria that live on plastic. Now, I'm a month away from submitting my thesis. SO I'm nearly finished.

To get into Arludo - the role I wanted required you to be a PhD candidate, and I was a PhD candidate. I sent them a video explaining what I do, and I wanted to join them, and I got in!

To join the Australian Space Agency (ASA), I was at a conference representing Arludo, and ASA had a booth. I went over, had a chat, and long story short - got a casual job out of it! I'm hoping to work for them until I figure out my next career move.



What do you love about your job?

Regarding my PhD, I love discovering things we didn't know before. I like the topic of plastic pollution - even though it's a grim subject that is hugely popular (and everyone is concerned about it), I like that I'm one of the very few in the whole world putting full-time effort into better understanding its impacts.

And I also love the communication side of being a researcher. I get to teach students things they didn't know before, especially about plastic pollution. I get to show them microplastics for the first time from the sand they collect from their school, using a microscope and see their faces and eyes ignite with surprise and passion (this is Arludo's work). I hope I inspire students to be mindful of their plastic waste. The fact that I could do that ignites my passion to keep going with my work and finish my PhD.

How does your job help people/the community/the world?

My main job is fully dedicated to better understanding one of the biggest modern threats to our oceans - plastic pollution. As it is a new issue, there are so many unknowns. I'm helping narrow the research gaps on the unknowns.

I also use my communication skills to talk about my research and plastic pollution in general to students, making them more aware of the reality.

What are two things you're not good at?

- Running
- Washing my car

What are two things you are good at?

- Anything related to water - snorkelling, diving, swimming, rowing
- A good advice-giver

What makes you happy (outside of work)?

Getting in the ocean (when the water isn't freezing) and travelling to new places.

Where do you want your career to take you?

I want my career to take me to a place where I can show my full potential.

