

EXPERIENCE SINGAPORE



Come Together

Special interest events that add to Singapore's vibrant society



Unity In Rhythm

Young Singaporeans cross cultural borders and dance to a new beat



Two-way Partnership

Mutual learning for different countries that face similar challenges

A Celebration of CULTURE

Festivals that showcase **harmony in diversity**

Ed's Note

Dear readers,

Singapore has long been a melting pot of cultures where diverse places of worship, practices, cuisines and languages co-exist. Nowhere is this 'unity in diversity' more prominent than in how the nation observes each cultural festival. From the main ones – Christmas; the Hindu festival of Lights, Deepavali; Chinese New Year; and the Muslim celebration of Hari Raya Aidilfitri – to others in between, each community pulls out the stops, with the Government stepping in to deck the streets in each traditional ethnic enclave with festive lights. Turn to **A different Singapore, every day** for an idea of the pageantry and festivities.

Singapore's *joie de vivre* (enjoyment of life) is not just confined to cultural celebrations. Throughout the year, its event calendar is packed with special interest festivals that are testaments to a vibrant and diverse society. Some like the mainstay Singapore Food Festival – now in its 24th edition – celebrate a shared love of food among its people. **Come together** highlights such festivals, both old and new.

Beyond showcasing diversity, these festivals are a lesson in inclusiveness, too. **Unity in rhythm** features young Singaporeans who have embraced traditional art forms – lion dance and Indian dance in particular – beyond that of their respective ethnicities.

On the global stage, **A case of mutual learning and understanding among partners** looks at how different countries face similar challenges. The Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) welcomed a 25-member delegation of senior government officials from China's Guangdong Province in October 2016 for a short-term study visit on "innovative enterprise management". During the year, five other Chinese delegations also visited under a G-to-G Framework Agreement on the exchange and training of mid-to senior-level Chinese officials.

Given China's changing developmental challenges, the Chinese government had requested that these recent visits focus on "non-traditional" themes. It is indeed apt then that while in Singapore, managing cultural, ethnic and religious diversity was one of the topics they had requested to study.

As we welcome 2017, let us look forward to more collaboration and understanding, both at home and with our partners and neighbours worldwide.

Teo Lay Cheng

Director
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore



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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SINGAPORE

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COME TOGETHER

Throughout the year, Singapore's event calendar is packed with special interest festivals, both new and established.

TEXT BY FAIROZA MANSOR



✦ A live painting by dancer, choreographer and environmental activist Sardono Kusumo at the Singapore International Arts Festival (SIFA) 2016.

Festivals that celebrate the arts and music to food and the environment is testament to Singapore's vibrant and diverse society. Some, like the Singapore Food Festival in July 2016, are annual mainstay events and indicate a shared love (in this case, of food) among its people. The festival was in its 24th edition, and showed no sign of slowing down.

It saw a record line-up of 18 events, from pop-up restaurants and cooking showdowns to classes and tours, up from 13 last year. Themed "Savor the Past, Taste the Future", it embraced culinary re-creations of local fare while honouring their heritage. The line-up, said Director of Attractions, Dining and Retail of the Singapore Tourism Board Ms Ranita Sundra, is a reflection of the "unique and adventurous food landscape that makes Singapore a vibrant dining capital".

✦ Visitors at the Singapore Food Festival 2016.



✦ Celebrity presenter Moses Lim showcasing award-winning hawker fare.



✦ Local delights such as popiah and satay were offered.




FAMOUSLY FAMILIAR

The prerequisite for a festival's continuity is without doubt, strong visitorship. In its ninth edition this year, the Singapore Night Festival, which was held over two consecutive weekends in August, drew half a million people. Presented by the National Heritage Board, it showcased roving street performances, light art installations and immersive activities at various locations in Singapore's civic district.

Themed "Inventions and Innovations", it had an experimental and unconventional line-up that included Harley-Davidson Singapore as a partner. Local artists also showcased their work alongside renowned international names. For the 2017 programme, festival director and Director of the National Museum of Singapore Ms Angelita Teo said, "It is going to be a challenge to create a beautiful, entertaining and show-stopping cultural display that everyone can be proud of. But one thing's for sure, it will be a celebration of the many people who have grown with and alongside the festival."

The Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA) too has

 **THAT'S WHAT THE FESTIVAL HAS BECOME IN THE LAST THREE YEARS, A SPECIAL PERIOD OF REFLECTION WHERE EVERYBODY WHO WANTS TO CAN ENGAGE.**

MR ONG KENG SEN, FESTIVAL DIRECTOR, SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF ARTS

amassed a growing following. Inaugurated in 1977, it went on a hiatus after 2012 but returned in 2014 with a renewed aim to inspire through international and local artistic experiences in performance, theatre, dance and music. Attendance in August and September 2016 more than doubled from 62,000 in 2015 to 155,000, despite a massive programme shrinkage (66 works in 2015 to 20 in 2016).

SIFA's festival director Mr Ong Keng Sen said he wants the festival to be a talking point for topics such as censorship and terrorism. "That's what the festival has become in the last three years, a special period of reflection where everybody who wants to can engage," said Mr Ong.

↑ A multimedia performance by Singapore's contemporary artist and film director Brian Gothong Tan at Gardens by the Bay, SIFA 2016.



↑ A presentation by Dutch street theatre company at the National Museum of Singapore, Singapore Night Festival 2016.

↓ French street artists making their rounds at the Singapore Night Festival 2016.



→ Audience of a literary talk held at the Singapore Writers Festival 2016.

Photos: Singapore Night Festival 2016, National Arts Council

Photo: Call The Shots Photography

FOR A BIGGER CAUSE

Festivals have proven effective as platforms to raise awareness for a cause, bolster a movement or simply spark discussions. The recent 10-day Singapore Writers Festival (in November 2016) did not shy away from extrapolating the significance of world events such as the refugee crises in Europe as well as the American presidential election. In its 19th edition, it featured close to 330 speakers and performers, including novelists, poets, musicians, theatre practitioners, film-makers, and academics. These included award-winning American author Lionel Shriver, and German investigative journalist Frederik Obermaier, who had a part in the Panama Papers exposé.

Its Guest-of-Honour, Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth Ms Sim Ann said in her speech that for many readers like her, the opportunity to meet the creative geniuses behind their favourite books were few and far between in the past. "The Singapore Writers Festival has made such opportunities regularly available to fans of the written word, and has helped to place Singapore on the literary world map," she noted.

Others like the National Parks Board (NParks)'s annual Festival of Biodiversity stands to educate and inspire the public to be more proactive in conserving Singapore's natural environment. Back for its fifth edition in September, the festival, held at the Singapore Botanic Gardens – the Republic's first UNESCO Heritage Site – showcased the native biodiversity in Singapore's marine, terrestrial and urban habitats.

At its launch event, NParks announced plans for 46 critically-endangered species of native plants and animals. "Our island has over 10 different ecosystems and more than 40,000 species of flora and fauna," said Senior Minister of State for National Development Mr Desmond Lee. "Our biodiversity is a national treasure... it is something that all of us here want to nurture and protect."



↑ As part of the Festival of Biodiversity 2016, giant clams, which can be found at the Sisters' Islands Marine Park, were introduced to visitors.

↔ Visitors also found out more about Singapore's upcoming sea turtle hatchery.

NEW ON THE BLOCK

There is always room for more festivals, it seems. Iconic electronic dance music festival Ultra, which was founded in 1997 in Miami, made its debut in Singapore over two days in September – a first for Southeast Asia. The line-up of about 50 artistes included popular Norwegian DJ-producer Kygo and Canada's deadmau5. Online tickets were sold-out before the event date, which saw about 20,000 partygoers descending upon the open field next to the iconic Marina Bay Sands.

There was also the inaugural four-day Singapore Coffee Festival that celebrated the island's coffee culture. Held in June, it attracted about 20,000 lovers of the bean and featured over 100 cafes, speciality brewers, coffee roasters and restaurants. Discussions about supporting sustainable coffee growth, workshops pairing coffee and chocolate, and latte art demonstrations were also conducted.

A common celebratory vibe is what unites these festivals, big or small. At the inaugural Illustration Arts Fest over two weekends in November, for example, 150 local illustrators got together to offer live drawing sessions as well as to celebrate their craft. "We want to give a face to the guy struggling behind the scenes trying to make a beautiful drawing," said festival director Mr Michael Ng, a full-time illustrator and co-founder of the Organisation of Illustrators Council, a professional community of about 40 to 60 illustrators in Singapore. "For the longest time, the illustrator was never in [the] public [eye]." ●



↑ Electronic dance music festival, Ultra Singapore, debuted in 2016 at the open field next to Marina Bay Sands Tower 1.



↕ 2016 also saw the introduction of new festivals such as the Singapore Coffee Festival and the Illustration Arts Fest.



A CASE OF MUTUAL LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG PARTNERS

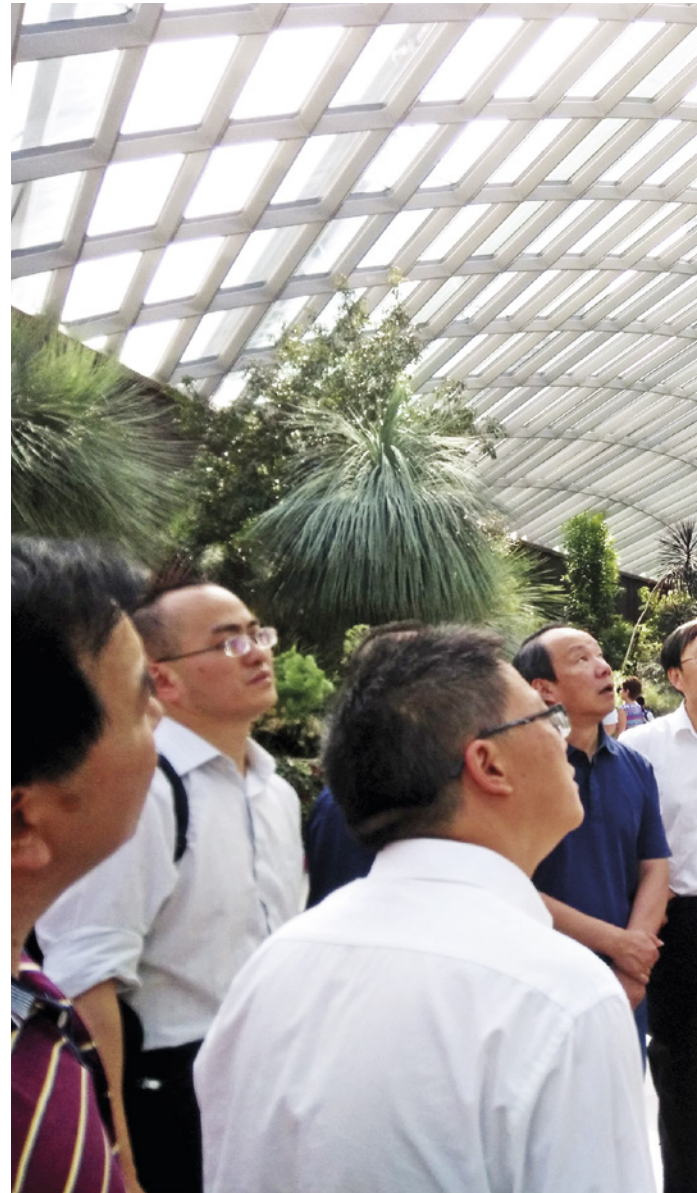
Different countries facing similar challenges.

TEXT BY SIM TZE WEI

A 25-member delegation of senior government officials from China's Guangdong province visited Singapore in October 2016 for a short-term study visit on "innovative enterprise management". One highlight of the programme was a visit to the constituency Meet-the-People Session (MPS) of Member of Parliament (MP) for Bishan-Toa Payoh, Mrs Josephine Teo, who is also Senior Minister of State (Prime Minister's Office, Foreign Affairs and Transport). The Guangdong officials were particularly interested in bread-and-butter issues that constituents raised, enthusiastically asking many questions. One question was whether Mrs Teo represented the Government or voters when addressing the latter's problems since she was both a Cabinet member and an MP for the constituency, and whether the two roles clashed. Mrs Teo's response was that if the voters' problems were valid, she would reflect them to the relevant ministries and find ways to address them. One Guangdong official said the weekly MPS and regular house visits by MPs to help voters address their problems were certainly something they could learn from. Another official also noted that in the 11-day exchange programme, the MPS was a worthy segment of learning.

Apart from Guangdong, the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) welcomed five other visiting Chinese delegations this year, namely from the China Executive Leadership Academy in Pudong (CELAP), Chongqing, Sichuan, Macau, and senior officials selected by the Central Organisation Department (COD) of the Communist Party of China. These visits fall under a G-to-G Framework Agreement signed in April 2001 on the exchange and training of mid- to senior-level Chinese officials. The programmes under this Framework Agreement are carried out by the SCP, Singapore's primary capacity building platform under the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

With the "Belt and Road Initiative" being the theme of the CELAP study visit held in June 2016, the programme focused on sharing Singapore's experience as a trade and commerce hub, and opportunities for collaboration under this Initiative. This photo shows Head of Delegation Mr Wen Shugang (first from left) and Deputy Head of Delegation Ms Li Xiaolin (centre) at the opening ceremony of the visit at MFA.





Senior Minister of State (Prime Minister's Office, Foreign Affairs and Transport) and Member of Parliament (MP) Mrs Josephine Teo sharing her insights with the Guangdong delegation at the Meet-the-People Session she hosted at her constituency in October 2016. At these Sessions, the MPs assist constituents with their problems, and provide feedback to the government during parliamentary sittings.

The Sichuan delegation visited in September 2016 to understand Singapore's sustainable urban planning and heritage conservation policies, and experience in creating sustainable and liveable cities. They made a field trip to the Gardens by the Bay, among others, to see first-hand how Singapore achieves its vision of transforming into "A City in a Garden".

TAILORED PROGRAMMES BASED ON EVOLVING CHALLENGES

Singapore takes a Whole-of-Government approach towards our human resource development cooperation with China, pooling resources from various government agencies to organise customised training and visit programmes for visiting Chinese delegations. These visits allow us to have frank exchanges on a wide range of issues both sides face. Since the mid-1990s, Singapore has received a total of more than 55,000 Chinese officials. The SCP alone has welcomed more than 6,600 Chinese officials since its inception in 1992.

Given China's rapid pace of development and changing developmental challenges, the Chinese have requested that the recent visits focus on "non-traditional themes", for e.g. sustainable urban planning, managing cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, overseas investment by SOEs, etc., alongside "mainstay" topics like economic development and public administration. For the six delegations this year, the customised programmes ranged from urban planning and heritage preservation (Sichuan), to modern connectivity (Chongqing) to the Belt and Road Initiative (CELAP).

TWO-WAY LEARNING

In the reverse direction, Singapore also sends its public service leaders to China to deepen their understanding of China's evolving policies, systems and culture, and learn from China's experiences. More than 200 senior Singapore civil servants have visited China on such programmes, helping to maintain close relations and foster friendships with their Chinese counterparts. One civil servant who participated in a public service leadership programme to Beijing and Xinjiang in October 2016 observed that Chinese cities have adopted many creative solutions to address issues related to transport, environmental pollution, housing, economic growth and public engagement. The different solutions China has come up with to address these complex issues offer worthy lessons and insights as they would help shape the model of urbanisation in the 21st century. Another participant commented that Singapore and China, despite the disparities in size and structures, face many common challenges and each side can learn much from the other.

Notwithstanding that conditions in Singapore and China differ considerably, both countries share similar thinking in many areas. Mrs Teo said that Singapore has always been a "firm supporter" in China's reform and opening up in the past three decades or so. She also pointed out that while Singapore is not a microcosm of China, Singapore's developmental experience does offer reference value to China given that both countries are Asian societies. China has not only overcome its past difficulties but also achieved successes in many areas, and both countries are actively learning from each other on the basis of mutual respect. ●



The Chongqing delegation at a briefing on Singapore's Smart Nation Vision, conducted by the Smart Nation Programme Office in September 2016. Centred on modern connectivity and services, the programme provided a useful platform for the Singapore hosts and Chongqing officials to network and exchange views in the areas of logistics, transport and aviation, financial services and ICT.

This article has been adapted from "新加坡接见选民经验 广东官员: 值得借鉴" first published in *Lianhe Zaobao* on 15 November 2016. Translated by: Translation Department, Ministry of Communications and Information, Singapore.

EACH OF THESE FESTIVALS, THE SIGHTS OF WHICH ARE ENJOYED BY ALL RESIDENTS, SHOWS OFF A UNIQUE ASPECT OF THE ISLAND'S HERITAGE.

TEXT BY
ASHUTOSH RAVIKRISHNAN

→ A chariot procession during the Hindu festival of Thaipusam.

A DIFFERENT SINGAPORE, EVERY DAY



A FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

The Little India enclave is always bustling and colourful, but even more so during the lead-up to **Deepavali**, which usually falls around October to November. During this Hindu festival, the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness is celebrated with arches of dazzling lights that adorn the streets around Little India. These are decorated with symbols of Hindu culture, including peacocks, elephants and Indian motifs. The island's Hindu community flock to Little India to stock up on prayer essentials, clothes and festive snacks. Traditional treats enjoyed include *murukku*, a savoury and crunchy snack.

Deepavali is not complete without traditional Indian snacks.



↑ Peacocks are auspicious birds in Hindu mythology and are often used in Deepavali decorations.

↓ Orchard Road is lit up with dazzling lights to celebrate the festive season.

ACTS OF DEVOTION

Thaipusam is a Hindu festival celebrated during the full moon in the month of *Thai* (January/February). This is when worshippers seek blessings, fulfil vows and offer thanks to Lord Murugan, the Hindu god of war and the destroyer of evil. As a display of piety, devotees carry a physical burden, known as a *kavadi*, on a 4.5km route between two historic temples. *Kavadis* include milk pots, piercings with skewers, or elaborate wood or steel frameworks that can weigh as much as 50kg each.

CHRISTMAS ON A GREAT STREET

It's easy enough to get into the festive mood as you stroll down Singapore's main shopping thoroughfare, Orchard Road, each November and December. For six weeks, a 2.2km-long stretch of the street is transformed into a sparkling fairyland. Glittering lights cascade from treetops while well-known symbols such as **Christmas** trees and reindeer can be seen at every turn. Carolling is common and malls boast mesmerising Christmas facades, with some going the extra mile by transforming into a winter wonderland, complete with snow foam.



Photos: Singapore Tourism Board, Shutterstock



Traditional lanterns are a common sight during the Mid-Autumn Festival.

LANTERNS GALORE

If you visit a park in Singapore on a full moon night between late September and early October, you are bound to find a procession of children carrying lanterns. They are celebrating the **Mid-Autumn Festival**, a Chinese harvest festival that also pays tribute to the moon.

It is not clear why lanterns became associated with the festival, but they remain a cherished tradition in many parts of Asia. Mooncakes are also synonymous with the festival. These are round pastries topped with an imprint of the Chinese characters for longevity or harmony. They traditionally boast a rich, thick filling of red bean or lotus seed paste, but contemporary recipes include diverse fillings such as durian, cream cheese, peanut and even ice cream.



A TIME TO GET TOGETHER

Ramadan is a holy month in the Islamic calendar, marked by a month-long period of fasting daily from dawn to dusk. The fasting is in an exercise in self-restraint as Ramadan is a time to detach from worldly pleasures and focus on one's prayers. Muslims also devote time to worship, do charitable deeds and acts of compassion.

The observance ends with **Hari Raya Aidilfitri** (also known as Eid-al-Fitr), when Muslims end their fasting with a celebration of forgiveness, fellowship and food. In the lead-up to this, Muslims visit the Geylang Serai Bazaar, a bustling marketplace in the heart of Singapore's historic Geylang district, to buy ethnic wear, such as the *baju kurung*. There are also mouth-watering Malay traditional snacks such as *ondeh-ondeh* (rice cake stuffed with palm sugar) and *putu piring* (steamed rice cakes with sweet grated coconut).

The streets around the bazaar are lit up to add to the festive and carnival atmosphere. The theme for July 2016 was "Deepening Our Kampung Spirit" to encourage Singaporeans of all races and religions to come together. The light-up was accompanied by exhibits that explained Malay heritage to tourists and non-Malays in Singapore.



← The Geylang Serai Bazaar is a must-visit for families preparing for Hari Raya Aidilfitri.



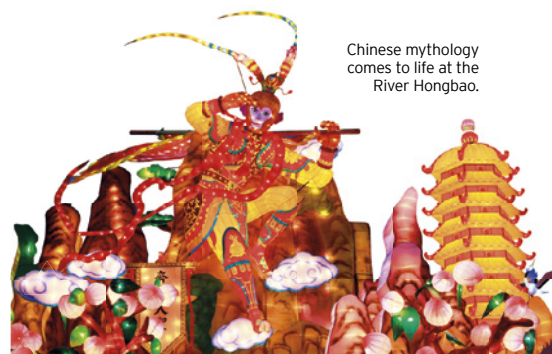
Singapore Heritage Fest 2016 attracted **1,500,000** million visitors

GEMS OF THE PAST

The **SINGAPORE HERITAGE FEST 2016** shone the spotlight on a familiar aspect of the island's heritage: its multicultural cuisine. Through pop-up stalls, organisers celebrated Singapore's vibrant street hawker scene of the 1960s. Such stalls once lined the island's roads and were popular with locals and tourists alike.

Besides food, the festival – which spanned three weekends in April and May – also celebrated the Republic's film industry at a unique outdoor screening of two local films on the offshore island of Pulau Ubin. Screenings like this were popular among the island's quarry workers and residents in the 1960s and 1970s.

Like previous years, the 13th edition of the annual heritage festival aimed to share lesser-known stories about Singapore with the younger generation. As part of the festival, a storytelling van also plied between historic buildings in the Civic District. Guides used these grande dames of architecture to bring the familiar Singapore story to life.



Chinese mythology comes to life at the River Hongbao.

DOWN BY THE RIVER

An annual festivity, the River Hongbao ushers in the **Chinese New Year** atop a pontoon – the Floating Platform @ Marina Bay. The carnival offers visitors a chance to immerse themselves in Chinese culture through colourful lanterns depicting the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, and a 18m-tall Chinese God of Fortune.

The event is also a treat for the taste buds, thanks to the largest outdoor food street in Singapore. Entertainment options include traditional Chinese opera, magic shows and acrobatic displays. The event culminates with a dazzling firework and pyrotechnic show, held every night until Chinese New Year itself.

The 2017 edition of River Hongbao in January will include decorations and performances with elements of roosters – because the coming new year will be the Year of the Rooster, according to the Chinese zodiac.



→ The Whitley Indian Dance Troupe performing at YOUTHphoria, a showcase that celebrates the arts with theatre, dance and music.



Photos: courtesy of Whitley Secondary School

UNITY IN RHYTHM

THESE YOUNG SINGAPOREANS EMBRACE TRADITIONAL ART FORMS OUTSIDE OF THEIR RACE, AND LOVE IT!

TEXT BY FAIROZA MANSOR



→ The dance group started attracting Malay and Chinese students from 2012.

MOVEMENTS THAT TELL A STORY

The Whitley Indian Dance Group has been one of the core-curricular activities (CCA) offered at Whitley Secondary School since 1996. While the traditional dance group started out with ethnic Indian students only, it began to attract Malay and Chinese students about four years ago – thanks to the efforts of new teachers-in-charge. Head of the Department of Physical Education and CCA, Mr Subramaniam Kaliappan said they were eager to encourage a broader segment of the student population to appreciate Indian culture. And they have succeeded by mixing the traditional dance steps with modern moves as seen in Bollywood movies.

"This promotion of Indian dance as a vibrant art form resonated well with the non-Indian students, who could relate to it due to the currency and trendiness of Bollywood movies," Mr Kaliappan told *Experience Singapore*. "The success of the [2008] Academy Award-winning film *Slumdog Millionaire* also helped to place the art form into the mainstream."

The 29-member group now has about 14 Chinese students, five Malays, and five Indians/Sikhs. The other members include Filipino and Myanmar students. Mr Kaliappan said they already have "an aptitude towards dance" and enjoy learning the unique movements and facial expressions of the art form. Secondary 4 student Gabrielle Tan joined the dance group two years ago when she was 14 because she was intrigued by the vibrant and celebratory vibe that the dance form embodies. "The choreography, involving gestures, movements and expressions, come together to tell a story. I get excited in narrating the story through my physical movements," said Gabrielle. "It's fun, and at the same time I've learnt a lot about, and have a renewed respect for Indian culture and heritage."



IT'S FUN, AND AT THE SAME TIME I'VE LEARNT A LOT ABOUT, AND HAVE A RENEWED RESPECT FOR INDIAN CULTURE AND HERITAGE.

GABRIELLE TAN

TOWARDS A HOLISTIC EDUCATION



Singapore's Ministry of Education considers **CCA** as an integral part of a student's holistic education. Through CCA, students discover their interests and talents while developing values and competencies that will prepare them for a rapidly changing world. CCA also promote friendships among students from diverse backgrounds as they learn, play and grow together. Participation in CCA fosters social integration and deepens students' sense of belonging, commitment and sense of responsibility to school, community and nation.



↑ The T-Net Club @ Bukit Merah's lion dance troupe at a community event for seniors.



TRAINING AS A TEAM

Usually performed during Chinese New Year and on other Chinese festivals, the Lion Dance is a form of traditional dance in Chinese culture. Performers in a lion costume mimic a lion's movements in a series of acrobatic stunts and movements believed to bring good fortune and wealth. Often accompanied by loud rhythmic drumming, a lion dance performance always draws a crowd. The lion dance troupe of the People's Association's Teens Network Club @ Bukit Merah receive such attention – coupled with curious stares. After all, the majority of the 80-member troupe are Malay youths – there are 62 of them, besides 13 Chinese and five Indian teenagers.

Person-in-charge Low Guo Bin, a former lion dance professional and now an officer with the Singapore Armed Forces, said that the troupe has been multi-racial ever since its formation in 1990. "Although Lion Dance is a traditional Chinese art form, this troupe has succeeded in attracting members from the different races into its ranks," said Mr Low. "The troupe does so by positioning itself as a welcoming second family to

↓ Members of the troupe having fun after a performance.



MADE FOR TEENS

The nationwide **TEENS NETWORK CLUB** is a non-profit organisation where teens aged 11 to 18 years old are able to participate in a range of refreshing, interactive and stimulating programmes and activities. These programmes are developed with the aim of inspiring and enriching the lives of these teenagers.



↑ Putting on a performance to welcome youths from ASEAN countries and Japan.



↑ The troupe trains weekly and performs regularly in the neighbourhood.

the members, many of whom are from the minority races as well as from less-privileged backgrounds."

Fourteen-year-old Nora Himah Binte Haja has been a member of the troupe since 2010. "Lion dance requires discipline, a sense of rhythm, coordination and agility," said the student of CHIJ Saint Theresa's Convent. "I enjoy training and performing with friends. It is very exciting to be performing for large crowds during festive celebrations."

Although rather large, the troupe, in Mr Low's opinion, gets along swimmingly. "Most of the members have grown up with one another as they've trained together weekly for many years," he said.

"Through the arduous training required to master the challenging dance movements, the members have bonded and learnt the value of discipline as well as teamwork." ●

Little India is all decked up for Deepavali.
(Cover) Christmas decorations along Orchard Road.

