

FOM is a volunteer, non-profit society dedicated to providing volunteer guides and support services for National Heritage Board (NHB) museums in Singapore. FOM programmes focus on the history, culture and art of Asia.

FOM is an Associate Member of the World Federation of Friends of the Museums.

FOM member privileges include free admission to NHB museums (excluding special exhibitions); access to FOM programmes including docent training, lectures, study tours, volunteer opportunities; a subscription to the FOM magazine, *PASSAGE*; and discounts at selected retail outlets, theatres and restaurants. Membership in FOM ranges from \$25 (senior) - \$100 (family) depending on category of membership.

For more information about FOM, visit our website www.fom.sg or contact the FOM office.

FOM Office

61 Stamford Road
#02-06 Stamford Court
Singapore 178892
Tel / Fax 6337 3685
email: office@fom.sg
website: www.fom.sg

Office Manager: Kavita Ramesh

Office Hours: Monday-Friday
9:00 am – 2:00 pm

FOM COUNCIL

President Elaine Cheong

Vice President Abha Dayal Kaul

Honorary Treasurer Rita Lee

Honorary Secretary Kate Horsburgh

Council Representatives

Victoria Ford

Preeti Khandelwal

Maren Kraemer-Dreyer

Ann Marie Regal

Past President Carla Forbes-Kelly

Unless otherwise stated, the abbreviation FOM used in this newsletter refers to Friends of the Museums Singapore.

FOM is not responsible for statements expressed in the signed articles and interviews.

Light up for Deepavali

By Abha Dayal Kaul

Deepavali (or *Diwali*) marks one of the grandest celebrations for Indians everywhere. It falls on a moonless or new moon night during the Hindu 'lunisolar' month of *Kartik*, in October or November, a time when the ancients revelled during bountiful harvests. This year, North Indians in Singapore are celebrating *Diwali* on 3 November, while local (mostly South) Indians are ushering it in on 2 November.

Despite variations in dates, names and ways to observe this most important Indian festival, its significance is common to all Hindus, also Jains and Sikhs. *Deepavali*, meaning 'row of lamps' in India's classical language Sanskrit, shortened to *Diwali*, refers to this glittering festival of lights symbolising the classic triumph of good over evil and light over darkness, when the light of knowledge and love eternally wins over the darkness of evil and ignorance.



Clay diyas

During *Diwali*, every home is illuminated with clay oil lamps (*diyas*) and we are reminded that living beings are all small flames of the same precious, divine light. Fireworks are set off to express jubilation, bonding with others and to celebrate the glorious victory over evil. Delicious feasts, traditional snacks and copious sweets are indulged in, emphasising the season's joy and the sweetness of smiles and loved ones. To enhance the festivities food and greetings are exchanged, along with creative wishes for good health, happiness and prosperity. Clever puns on light-related concepts abound, for example, lamps of knowledge, lighting up faces or the world, having a *Diwali* cracker, burning fat and cholesterol, bringing a sparkle to life and a glow of beauty within and around us.

Homes, offices and streets are thoroughly cleaned and beautifully decorated with fresh flowers, coloured powder, sand or rice. Vivid *rangoli* designs (*mandala*-like, with auspicious connotations) are laboriously traced on the ground to attract and welcome gods and guests alike. Prayers to elephant-headed Ganesha are offered at home altars and in temples, to remove all obstacles from our paths, and to lustrous Lakshmi, to shower blessings of wealth and abundance, both material and spiritual. Other gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are also worshipped – all are manifestations of the one divine source since individuals have unique, personal relationships with its countless forms and names.



The goddess Lakshmi

Shri Rama of Ramayana fame is especially honoured as it was on *Diwali* that he brought happiness back to Ayodhya, returning after 14 years of exile, having vanquished kidnapper-king Ravana and rescued his beloved wife Sita. Just as his loyal subjects lit lamps of welcome and joy for Rama, his selfless brother Lakshmana and devoted friend, the monkey-god Hanuman, so we light lamps in commemoration and invitation to Lord Rama to return to our lives.

Shri Krishna is remembered for destroying the demon Narakasura on *Diwali* eve, saving thousands from hellish confinement. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindus' holiest book, Lord Krishna reminds us that he resides within our hearts as the divine presence everywhere, both outside and within us.

Shri Lakshmi is invoked and worshipped with elaborate prayers (*puja*). During *Diwali* everyone longs for her visit and extended stay during her earthly sojourns. Detesting darkness and seeking light on this blackest of nights, Lakshmi favours the purest and brightest homes and hearts.

This is a time for new beginnings, so we clean up, buy new items and wear new clothes to feel 'new' on this joyful occasion. Some celebrate it as the 'new' year. *Diwali* is a time of renewal and rejoicing, of sharing and merry-making – truly a dazzling festival of light and delight.

Abha Dayal Kaul guides, leads study tours and serves as Vice President for FOM. She wishes *PASSAGE* readers a bright and prosperous *Diwali*!
