

## **More young S'poreans volunteering at museums Professionals in their 20s and 30s, working in various fields, signing up as guides**

By Jeremy Lim



*Mr Dinesh Sathisan, a defence policy officer at the Ministry of Defence, volunteers at the Peranakan Museum. He gets satisfaction from guiding, knowing that someone has learnt something about the history of Singapore.*  
-- ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Volunteer museum guide Dinesh Sathisan, 31, has a favourite bed at the Peranakan Museum.

It belonged to a couple from Penang, who left it behind when they moved to Singapore. Unfortunately, traditional beliefs stated that the wife should give birth on the bed where the marriage was consummated.

So it resulted in a series of trips back to Penang whenever a baby was due. Eventually, they decided it was easier to move the bed to Singapore.

Mr Dinesh, who works at the Ministry of Defence, never fails to raise a chuckle when he tells that story to museum visitors.

And the satisfaction of knowing that someone has learnt something about this place's history is why he is one of a growing group of young Singaporeans who are volunteer museum guides.

Museum Volunteers, their coordinator, says almost all its new recruits are Singaporean, and more than half are in their 20s and 30s.

They work in fields like education, finance, real estate, energy, IT, law and health care.

And they willingly give up at least one weekend a month to be guides, without pay.

'It's really addictive!' says Ms Avril Tan, 33, who works in regional sales at a bank and has been a guide at the Singapore Art Museum for four years. 'It's a lot of fun because everyone has a different interpretation of the artwork.'

Guides say they are inspired by historians who make the past come alive on their study weekends.

'We had some fascinating lecturers, like Associate Professor Bruce Lockhart from NUS (National University of Singapore), who could explain South-east Asian politics in Sang Nila Utama's time way better than anyone,' says new volunteer Tan Yew Guan, 39, a producer at Channel NewsAsia and a guide at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Each volunteer signs up for a particular museum, attends about 20 weekend classes with tests, and commits to leading a tour once a month for a year after graduation. Of the 72 who last applied, 41 made it all the way through.

But more than 60 of Museum Volunteers' 168 active guides have stayed for five years or more.

There are other docents with Friends of the Museums who guide on weekdays.

Young people have become more concerned about preserving their heritage, said university executive Low Zhiqi, 25, pointing to the recent active interest over saving the Bukit Brown Cemetery and Tanjong Pagar Railway Station.

Ms Low, who is a guide at the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, says: 'Singapore is a forward-looking city, and sometimes we forget there is a past. But we should treasure connections between the past and the future.'

Museum Volunteers president Ma Swan Hoo, 55, says volunteers help the tourism industry by promoting the museums. 'And they help our local population learn about our own culture,' she adds.



*Recruiter Deanna Rashid, who volunteers at the Asian Civilisations Museum, enjoyed her first visit to the museum so much that she signed on to be a guide. -- ST PHOTO: JOYCE FANG*