

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

October 2019 to September 2020

Friends of the Museums, Singapore (FOM) offers volunteering and learning opportunities for FOM members and the community at large with a focus on the history, art and culture of Asia. We organize events, activities and training sessions towards this purpose. However, the year 2020 posed unforeseen challenges due to COVID19. FOM initially proceeded with caution but when Singapore moved to DORSCON Orange on 7 Feb, FOM immediately suspended docent-led tours, public events and many of our member events. To comply with the Circuit Breaker measures, FOM office was closed on 7 April. It has since re-opened on 22 July by appointment only. FOM's Public Information Morning and Open Morning were held virtually. Our museums, activity and communication leaders moved their activities online where possible and found new ways to engage members. I am pleased to share with you some of the key initiatives undertaken this year.

Museum Programmes

Service to Singapore's museums and institutions is at the heart of FOM's mission. Our docents conduct tours for the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), National Museum of Singapore (NMS), Singapore Art Museum (SAM), The Peranakan Museum (TPM), Gillman Barracks (GB), Indian Heritage Centre (IHC), Malay Heritage Centre (MHC), STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery (STPI), Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall (SYSNMH) and walking tours of the 4 Chinatown Precincts, Kampong Gelam and Little India.

In addition to regular guiding, FOM docents guided several special exhibitions such as, *Living with Ink, An Old New World, From the Coromandel Coast to the Straits, From Brush to Lens, Seekor Singa, Seorang Putera, dan Sebingkai Cermin* and the 2019 Biennale titled *Every Step in the Right Direction*, FOM members volunteered for the *Singapore to Singaporean: The Bicentennial Experience* exhibition which was extended until December 2019.

Minimum guiding requirements for FOM docents have been waived for 2019-20 and 2020-21. Docents from all museums continue to research and share their knowledge with fellow guides at Docent Ongoing Training sessions (DOT) held via Zoom. Closed since 7 April, Singapore museums reopened on 26 June. FOM docents resumed guiding on 24 August 2020. This financial year, FOM docents guided 21,905 visitors on 2,337 tours. The visitors included 5,583 students and staff, 642 special needs visitors and 377 visitors guided virtually. Our Japanese Docents (JD) led 2470 visitors on 385 tours.

Docent training for 2019-20 was conducted for ACM, NMS, STPI, SYSNMH, and URA. With social distancing restrictions, docent training went online and mentor tours were hosted virtually. In this round, 102 new docents joined our docent pool, including 25 Japanese Docents.

Docent training for the year 2020 has been cancelled due to the current situation.

Member Activities

FOM activities moved online and saw an increase in participation across most activity groups. Asian Study Group, Asian Film Study Group, Textile Enthusiasts Group, Monday Morning Lectures, Friday with Friends and the seven Asian Book groups all met virtually for most of the year. Virtual Theatre Session, Textile Study Group and Kantha Embroidery Workshops are new online activities initiated this year. Curio and Explore Singapore! groups met locally, while Study Tours took members on international trips before the pandemic. These groups will resume their activities once restrictions ease up.

With the support of FOM docents, a unique ten-week online certificate program *Asian Art & History for Museum Enthusiasts* (AAHME), was launched for all FOM members with lectures spanning across various museums and institutions where FOM docents guide. A total of 151 Museum Enthusiasts hailing from 27 countries signed up for the course. The AAHME course, along with other new initiatives, Monday Morning Lockdown Lectures and Arm Chair Travel series saw members joining not only from Singapore but also from overseas.

Communications

We have transitioned smoothly from Webmail to G Suite. This year we invested in Zoom as our events and activities moved online. Personalized emails were sent for major events to get information out to members. We continue to update the website with the latest offerings. FOM's flagship bi-monthly magazine, *PASSAGE*, with well-researched articles written especially for our members continued to be delivered to our members unhindered by Circuit Breaker measures. FOM Members can keep themselves informed on all FOM related events via our Website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter page, Newsletters, and *PASSAGE* magazine.

Volunteer Recognition and Appreciation

This year appreciation certificates were awarded to all members who had volunteered for a minimum of one year with FOM. Of the approximately 350 volunteers invited for the Volunteer Appreciation event, 95 volunteers were awarded a pin for 3, 5, 10, 15, 20 and 25 years of volunteering with FOM. Ms. Roopa Deewan was the recipient of this year's Salome De Decker Award, which is given to a volunteer who epitomizes hard work and humility.

FOM has been selected by the National Heritage Board to receive the 2019 Patron of Heritage Awards (POHA).

Philanthropy

A new initiative, *FOM Members Care* activity group was launched to provide opportunities for all FOM members to give back to the community. The inaugural *Walk for Rice* event in November 2019 saw 230 participants walking 1,087km to donate 10,870 bowls of rice and 5,435 bowls of oatmeal for families in need.

Docent workshops on *Guiding the Elderly & Persons with Dementia in Public Spaces* and *Guiding Seniors* were organized to raise awareness for the FOM Cares initiative. Launched last year, the FOM Cares initiative aims to support Singapore's museums and art and heritage sites in their efforts to become inclusive spaces. FOM docents guided 642 visitors on the FOM Cares tours.

FOM has committed to continue giving to education through the FOM-NHB Heritage Grant. The grant provides our museums' education and program staff members with the opportunity to gain valuable experience with some of the world's leading museums. This year's grant recipients are Ms. Shereen Tan, Manager (Outreach & Education), Malay Heritage Centre, and Ms. Mandy Lim, Assistant Manager, Education and Community Outreach.

The Future

For now, we have managed to keep most of our existing members and even added new members due to the multitude of online offerings. However, the coming year will be financially challenging. We are likely to dip into our reserves. Cancellation of the 2020/21 Docent training, restrictions on events and activities, and members relocating from Singapore will have a negative impact on our revenues. Due to the prudent practices of previous councils, we have healthy reserves to help us through this time, though we will have to tighten our belt. We in the FOM family are lucky to have supportive members and volunteers as we navigate our way through these unprecedented times. I am sure that we will come out of this pandemic stronger and a closer-knit community.

My sincere thanks to all our volunteers for their contributions, our members for keeping faith in us, and our partners for their unwavering support this year.

Thank you.



Garima G. Lalwani

President
Friends of the Museums, Singapore