

FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUMS (SINGAPORE)

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

October 2021 to September 2022

Introduction

Friends of the Museums, Singapore (or FOM) began in 1978 and was registered as a society in 2004 to support Singapore museums with guiding services. We also offer volunteer and learning opportunities for FOM members and the community at large, with a focus on the history, art and culture of Asia. FOM also organises events, activities and training programmes towards this.

FOM is also a diverse community. Our membership as of 1st November 2022 was 1,297. It currently stands at 1551, with members hailing from over 40 countries.

This last year, 2022, we've been very encouraged to see the gradual and eventual opening up of Singapore after the restrictions of the Covid period.

Museum Programmes

At the heart of FOM's mission is service to the museums, heritage institutions and walking trails. This year, we continued to guide for the following:

1. Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM)
2. National Museum of Singapore (NMS)
3. Indian Heritage Centre (IHC)
4. Malay Heritage Centre (MHC)
5. Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall (SYSNMH)
6. STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery (STPI)
7. Gillman Barracks (GB)
8. URA-FOM Chinatown walking tours in four precincts
9. Malay Heritage Foundation-FOM Kampong Gelam Heritage Trail

There're also a few updates on the museums front:

The Peranakan Museum (or TPM) will reopen in Feb next year and we will resume guiding after re-orientation.

The Singapore Art Museum (or SAM) has been closed for refurbishment for some years now and FOM docents no longer guide there on a regular basis. We look forward to continuing our partnership on an ad hoc basis and building on the relationship forged over the years. I would like to express sincere thanks to the SAM docent community for holding out for so long. We

hope you will continue to be engaged in our other Arts cluster offerings at STPI and Gillman Barracks.

Over at MHC, doors closed at the end of October for a refresh which will probably take about two years. Many thanks to our docents for your dedication; FOM will actively engage everyone in the interim.

The 3++ System and Guiding Stats

On Jan 10th 2022, we started guiding again in-person. Hence, the Docent Commitment Points (or DCP) System, which was used for the guiding year beginning April 2021, was discontinued for the new guiding year. In its place is the new 3++ System, where docents may continue to fulfil a minimum of four tours a year to stay active, OR conduct three tours, AND be involved in docent training programmes. Initiated at the height of the spread of the then-new Omicron variant, this scheme allowed those who were still concerned about guiding to pay it forward in the next training programme as well as ensured the sustainability of training as we transitioned away from Covid protocols.

Nationwide, the public health alert was lowered to DORSCON Yellow on the 26th of April, and on 29th August, masks became optional and restriction on group sizes was lifted. The docent community was energised yet again.

This financial year we conducted 2,237 tours for 14,632 visitors this. Out of these tours, 388 were conducted by the Japanese docents at ACM and NMS. In addition, FOM docents also guided special exhibitions, such as:

1. Dislocations, at NMS
2. Russel Wong in Kyoto and Batik Kita at ACM
3. Cerita at MHC
4. Sikhs in Singapore: An Untold Story, at IHC
5. Nian Hua : Guardians & Auspicious Art at SYSNMH

Docent Training

Docent training programmes which began again on a hybrid online-in person model in the third quarter of the last financial year saw 47 new docents freshly minted at the ACM, NMS and IHC this year. In the second quarter of this year, SYSNMH completed training, adding 10 new docents. With the new Japanese docents, the total number of new FOM docents for the year is 70.

In September this year, in-person docent training began at ACM and NMS – the programmes are still in progress and are due to complete in the second quarter of next year. Training will also begin very soon early next year at the IHC, Changi Chapel and Museum, TPM and for the URA-FOM Chinatown Heritage Trails.

Member Activities

Monday Morning Lectures (or MML) shifted from virtual lectures open only to members, to hybrid delivery. We opened the new season on 5th September with much excitement with an in-person event at the ACM, just like old times. This was a public event. The next MML was delivered virtually only for members. Going into the new year, we intend to continue this alternating model, which meets the preferences of those who have become accustomed to the convenience of attending lectures at home, and those who prefer attending them in-person. It also allows us to draw on speakers from around the globe.

Electronic Media & *PASSAGE*

In our outreach to members, we continue to send out the weekly and monthly electronic Newsletters. The FOM website, FOM's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts also keep members and the public informed about our activities.

Our flagship publication, *PASSAGE* magazine, underwent a major refresh this year with a new editorial and production team. The decision was also made for *PASSAGE* to go quarterly, instead of bi-monthly. This move will better focus our limited volunteer resources in a sustainable manner, to keep our flagship publication flying for years to come.

Volunteer Recognition and Appreciation

This year, 371 volunteers were invited to attend Volunteer Appreciation Morning or VAM, a unique activity-based event held at the Malay Heritage Centre. 104 members were also awarded service pins: 43 for the 3-year pin, 40 for a 5-year pin, 19 for a 10-year pin, one for a 15-year pin and one for a 20-year pin.

The Salome De Decker Award, given annually by FOM to a volunteer who epitomises hard work and humility, was awarded to Ms Tan Shook Fong for her 19 years of dedicated service to FOM.

Philanthropy

FOM is committed to continuing giving to education through the FOM-National Heritage Board Heritage Grant, which gives our museums' education and programme staff members the opportunity to gain valuable experience at the world's leading museums. For the last two years, the grant was put on hold because of travel restrictions. We will be resuming this grant award in the new year.

NHB Heritage Award

In appreciation of FOM's contributions to the heritage sector, we were honoured as a Supporter, last November, by the National Heritage Board (NHB) at the annual Patron of Heritage Awards (POHA) 2020. Out of the over 42 Supporter awardees, FOM was the only society so recognised for contributions that have, in the words of the NHB "helped ensure that important heritage and cultural work - the glue which binds us together - continues to flourish in these unprecedented times".

Innovation

With the increased use of IT for many of our activities in the last few years, we felt it was time to take advantage of our growing familiarity with IT to see how else we could simplify our operations. So for the first time this year, absentee voting for the new 2022-2023 FOM Council members was done via electronic voting. This was a bold move, made after weeks of testing and discussion. We've saved resources, time and effort and become more environmentally friendly.

The Future

With life in Singapore almost completely back to normal and ostensibly out of the shadows of Covid-19, members have been able to enjoy and participate in FOM activities as per normal. We've seen a palpable buzz of excitement at FOM events and activities. We're sad to bid farewell to some of our members who've had to relocate out of Singapore, but at the same time, we warmly welcome the new members who've joined the FOM family.

Financially, we are healthy, with reserves to ensure a secure future operationally, and we will continue to be cautious with expenditure.

FOM is by the members, for the members. It is always evolving, but the FOM spirit of passion, dedication and generosity, and the strong friendship bonds among members, will keep us going and growing for a long time to come. As we come to the end of our 44th year, we can confidently report that FOM's future is secure and bright.

Thank you for your contributions and for being a part of FOM!



Millie Phuah
President
Friends of the Museums (Singapore), Nov 2022