

MV Monthly

The latest news from our volunteers and the museum

Nr 6 - April 2014

Extra form for extra stats

We are still striving to do better and more professional. That's why we would like to know a little more about our guests - and that's why there's an extra form for you to fill in. You'll find it in the office, with the vests. For more info on the why and how, please see **Page 2**.

Avalokitesvara and Buddha Brahmin visit New York

Never a dull moment in Gallery B: the Islamic ceramics have returned, but now the bronze Avalokitesvara and the smaller Buddha Brahmin are away - loaned to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, for the exhibition *Lost Kingdoms - Hindu-Buddhist Sculptures of Early Southeast Asia*. This exhibition starts 14 April and will last until 27 July. You can check this [link](#) to see how they're doing. In the meantime, two replicas are taking the place of the two bronze statues in our own Museum Negara.

And the website has moved, too!

Some problems of the administrative kind have forced us to move our website to a new address. From now on, you'll find all you need to know on museumvolunteersjmm.com. Please take a look!

Save the date: 20 April

Dato' J. Jegathesan has kindly offered to guide us around the **Indian temple on Jalan Scott in Brickfields**. He will do that on Sunday 20 April, 10 am. Interested? Please send an email by clicking [here](#). because places are limited.

MVs enjoy an Artistic Saturday with Beringin Emas

Roads closure on 1 March in the heart of Kuala Lumpur did not dampen the spirits of 40 enthusiastic MVs indulging themselves in Malay Cultural Performances in Beringin Emas Theater, Dataran Undrgrnd. Free passes were allocated to MV's courtesy of fellow MV Zaifulsham.

Greeted by an usherer dressed in Malay costume, we entered the dimly lit theater and felt as if we had been time travelling to an ancient Malay royal theatre. The audience occupied three sides of the stage. Welcoming us was the traditional instrumental music played by a group of passionate musicians seated on the fourth side of the stage.

Despite the performances being conducted in Malay and/or Kelantanese language, the eager crowds, including foreign tourists, were fascinated by the authentic *Mak Yong* dance and Theater (UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and



Intangible Heritage of Humanity), *Wayang Kulit Kelantan* (Kelantanese shadow play), *Silat Jawi* (traditional martial arts), *Asyik* and *Inai* dances. The theatre was equipped with four screens displaying the introduction of each performance in English, so everybody could understand what was going on on the stage.

The highlights of the performance were none other than the *Silat Jawi* and *Inai* dance. Professionally trained, the performers kept the audience entertained by demonstrating their mastery of the martial arts by moving quickly and 'attacking' each other precisely. The *Inai* dancers backbend all the way to the floor, moving forward to the banknote

placed on the ground and picking it up with their mouths. Needless to say the dance moves were amazingly graceful. Another memorable experience of the day was when I went backstage during the Kelantanese shadow play depicting the *Ramanyana* epic. Rest assured that the backstage was completely unpredictable. Lastly, the performers helped the audience out as they were allowed to try their best at dancing or playing the traditional instruments.

All in all, the MV's tremendously enjoyed the performances and left with a greater understanding of the Malay traditions. Credit goes to Beringin Emas, a corporation specialising in Malay traditional performing arts, for its efforts in preserving the Malay traditions so they will not be forgotten in these modern times. Good news to everybody who missed it: the Kelantanese shadow play and *Mak Yung* dance will be performed in the same theatre on a daily basis!

Carmen Kar Ming

Join our quest for more guests!

Last year was a great year for the Museum Volunteers, with a record number of visitors who joined one of our free guided tours. Still, if you look at the total number of visitors that come to the National Museum, there's only a very small percentage of people taking a tour.

Of course we believe that you'll get more out of your visit to the museum if you're joined by a guide to answer your questions and tell you things you never even thought of asking about. So the question is: how do we get more people to not only come to the museum, but also join one of our tours?

The PR committee has been working very hard on new folders and will start this month with bringing brochures to a



selected group of hotels and guesthouses in Kuala Lumpur. There will be laminated pages for the hotels to keep and wallet sized brochures for the guests to take with them. The PR committee will contact the hotels after a set amount of time to see if they need new brochures and ask for their experiences.

In the meantime, we would also like to know if it helps to send out those brochures. That's why there's a new form on the desk in the office, at the same place where you sign off for your vest. On the form, we would like you to put down some more details about your guests: where they heard about our guided tours, for instance. It's also possible to put down comments and remarks about the tour or the museum and you can also write down questions that your guests asked you that you didn't know the answer to. Those questions will be answered in the newsletter.

Hopefully this new form gives us more feedback on how and where to reach our potential guests, so we can guide even more people and take the mystery out of history for them!

Extra Exhibition: Dongson Culture



From the middle of March until 4 May, the central hall of the museum is dedicated to an extra exhibition on the Dongson culture. The exhibition was officially opened on 11 March by Datuk Dr Ong Hong Pen, Secretary General of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia. It's a beautiful addition to the Dongson drum and bell already in Gallery A. Not too sure about the Dongson Culture? Here's a little extra info to help you through...

The Dongson culture originated from Northern Vietnam, where it's linked with the initial discovery of bronze drum artifacts. It's believed that the culture became widespread in several parts of Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, the Philippines, Borneo and Indonesia. Dongson is located in an area known as Bac Ho. The site is one of the earliest metal manufacturing sites in Southeast Asia, apart from the northern Thailand region. Other bronze objects, like needles, fishhooks and scrapers were also

found there. The patterns and motives on the Dongson drum clearly illustrates the society's involvements and achievements in the agricultural field. The farmers used water to irrigate the rice fields, and animals to plough them. There are motifs of human forms pounding paddy found on drums, as well as humans guarding the paddy store. The people of Dongson were also skilled in producing objects or accessories of a decorative nature. Among jewellery items produced by them were several earrings,

bracelets, arm bracelets and anklets made from metal, of either bronze or iron. They also produced various types of weapons that truly showcased their skills and high level of creativity. The weapons were not only used for hunting, but also as a symbol of power or as ritual paraphernalia. The knowledge garnered about the culture has been largely obtained from their burial sites. One of the key features was the practice of grave provision: people would be buried with various types of

equipment. The Dongson drum was one of those objects for someone of some standing in the community. In addition, the drum would be pounded according to a certain rhythm to express the sense of grief over the death. The designs on the drum would depend on the status of the individual. The drum was also used as one of the gifts presented to couples looking to marry. Based on radiocarbon dating, it is believed that around 500 to 300 BC was the onset of the classic Dongson phase.