

Night of good fun and crazy crowds

Night Festival line-up gets thumbs-up, but many feel event was too packed

Lydia Vasko

The Singapore Night Festival closed its sixth edition last Saturday to mixed reviews.

While festivalgoers enjoyed the diverse programme, the number of attendees and the expanse of the festival arena made it difficult for visitors to catch all the events, even if they went on multiple nights.

This year's festival venues stretched from Plaza Singapura to Raffles City, and included Waterloo Street, Queen Street and Armenian Street. There were almost 80 free events, including traditional and contemporary music performances, film screenings and interactive art events.

More than 10,000 people crowded around the National Museum's facade and on the corner of the Singapore Management University (SMU) Green across Stamford Road each night to catch the festival's highlight performances by French acrobatics troupe Compagnie Retouramont and Singaporean illusionists JC Sum and Magic Babe Ning.

This meant that some festivalgoers, such as financial consultant Chen Xueyi, 25, found it difficult to watch the acts. "I wish they had a more elevated stage because I could hardly see the performers. I left halfway through and went to see the bands at SMU."

Others, like Mr Ezra Nicholas, 28, who attended the festival with his wife Tanni Tang, 28, saw the crowds and turned away.

"The crowd in front of the National Museum was so big, it was crazy and hectic, so we never made it there. I wish the festival was longer so that we had more time to get to all the performances, which were really spread out this year," he says.

The couple also had trouble getting home after the festival, as bus and train operating times were not extended to coincide with the festival's hours from 7pm to 2am.

Festival director Angelita Teo, 41, who is also director of the National Museum of Singapore, says extending the hours of public transportation is beyond the organisers' control, though they kept the issue in mind when organising events.

"We do organise our programming such that the majority of performances end before midnight, so people can catch public transportation home," she says.

But most of the more than 20 festivalgoers Life! spoke to enjoyed the offerings this year. Mr Nicholas says: "It's really fantastic. I've just been blown away this year. Before, the festival was just something to look at. Now you get to touch it and be a part of it. I like that there are more visual installations and interactive aspects this year."

One such interactive piece was The Magic Melody by Tigrelab, a light show projected onto the Singapore Art Museum's facade.

Members of the public could use the eight iPads stationed in front of the museum to direct brightly coloured geometric shapes across the museum's columns and archways.

Another crowdpleaser was local circus and dance troupe Starlight Alchemy, whose performance incorporating fire and LED lights on the first weekend drew applause from thousands of spectators.

Their interactive session outside the National Museum last Saturday night attracted at least 100 people. Kids and adults alike took turns twirling the troupe's LED tools like hula hoops and glow wands, guided in their technique by troupe members.

Introducing more interactive elements was one of the festival's goals, says Ms Teo. "Every year, we try to offer things that will appeal to people from all backgrounds, interests and expectations. The interactive elements are fun and help people connect with the art and artists. We hope to have more of such events next year."

She was also pleased with the turnout



Near Fort Gate, visitors to the Night Festival try their hand at writing the words, Light Up Ninja, using LED lights with coloured gels in an activity organised by the Lighting Detectives. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE



Starlight Alchemy (above) at the National Museum of Singapore used fire and LED tools for its performance, while MoonGrazing by OICSingapore (left) lit up the museum facade.

at this year's festival, which saw more families and more people going early to catch the performances.

The festival's organiser, the National Heritage Board, estimates that more than 400,000 people attended the event, though exact figures will not be known until next week.

The National Museum, Singapore Art Museum and Peranakan Museum - which offered free late-night admission to their premises and special exhibitions - saw thousands of visitors during the festival.

The National Museum alone had an average of 16,000 visitors a night - a 70 per cent increase compared to the number of museum visitors during last year's night festival.

So many people swarmed the area around the National Museum that some festivalgoers have called for the closure of Stamford Road to have more room for people to move around and watch the performances.

While Stamford Road was closed to cars for previous festivals, the Land Transport Authority has denied festival organisers' requests to close the road for the past two years because it is worried about the traffic congestion it would cause.



Illusionists JC Sum and Magic Babe Ning attempt to free themselves from their straitjackets (right) and The Magic Melody light show by Tigrelab (left).



"The Circle Line construction in Bencoolen Road has made it difficult for the LTA to close the road in the past two years. We've always wanted to close Stamford Road. We try every year, we don't give up," says Ms Teo. "But it really depends on when the construction project will be completed."

However, experienced festivalgoers like Ms Charlene Chong, 42, and Ms Lee Lin Kiak, 48, knew what to expect. The two friends had been to three previous night festivals together and were there

early on opening night. They went with a plan of what they wanted to see: Compagnie Retouramont and the light installations which spanned the festival area.

Ms Lee says: "We walked around to see what we could, but we took the last train home."

Tight Squeeze At Night Festival Shows: See Page C6
 What can be done to improve the Singapore Night Festival? E-mail stlife@sph.com.sg