

Celebrate the New Year in your neighbourhood

By AMELIA TENG

MARINA Bay will not be the only place in Singapore where the New Year will be ushered in with fireworks.

Sengkang, Keat Hong, Sembawang, Nee Soon and Bukit Panjang will also play host to pyrotechnics, giving heartlanders the chance to welcome 2014 with a bang when the clocks strike midnight on Wednesday.

These countdown parties are among more than 40 that will take place this year.

While many will make a bee-line for the fireworks, organisers have also come up with novel ways to welcome the New Year, from pony rides and dinosaur displays to a mass Harlem Shake performance.

Punggol West's countdown party at the open field beside Punggol MRT station tomorrow is looking to pull in more young families with its carnival activities, including pony rides, ukulele performances and game booths.

"We hope they'll come down nearer their homes instead of going to town and booking a hotel," said Punggol West constituency manager Annette Wang.

While this year's expected turnout of 90,000 is set to be similar to last year's, more residents are volunteering to help out, a spokesman for the People's Association, which oversees the parties, told The Straits Times.

They reach out to other residents, run game stations or even put up performances, giving them a chance to interact.

Said Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC MP Janil Puthuchery: "It's not just the event itself... but the run-up and the planning process is an opportunity for residents to get together and know their neighbours better."

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Sengkang West grassroots organisation's party last year at Anchorvale Community Club drew more than 3,000 people. PHOTO: PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION

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year is a slight dip from the 50 last year as some grassroots organisations have decided to combine celebrations.

Tanjong Pagar GRC and Radin Mas SMC, for instance, organised a three-day party, which ended yesterday.

Around 15,000 people took part in a series of 60 mini-events, including heritage walks, a street carnival and a sports telematch, as part of the joint celebration.

"Normally we have one big event, but senior citizens don't come because it's too late for them," said Mr Ajay Bhattacharya, who headed the party's planning committee for the first

time. The 50-year-old is a managing director of a chemical production company.

Some 2,000 people joined the walking trail, led by 20 students from Singapore Polytechnic and Singapore Management University and grassroots leaders.

It included visits to heritage sites such as the old Hakka Cemetery in Holland Close, and the Holland Village windmill, where an open-air cinema operated by the former Eng Wah Cinemas used to stand.

Said Mr Ajay: "It was a way to celebrate the past, present and future."

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