

Play

# From generation to generation

The National Museum is now more family-friendly than ever with the launch of a new children's gallery.

**Y**ou may remember the adventure-comedy film *Night at the Museum*, in which exhibits magically come to life when the museum is closed.

Although just a fantasy, the filmmakers were right about one thing — far from being stodgy, museums can be fun and exciting for children!

Museums offer a number of benefits for pre-schoolers. For one, the various artefacts and contextual displays "help young children make sense of the world they live in and also provide them with a sense of their heritage and cultural past," says Ms Thangamma Karthigesu, Director of Education for the National Heritage Board (NHB) and Director of the NHB Academy.

For example, you can stop at different exhibits and share stories with your kids of what life was like for you 'back in the day'. This not only strengthens family and inter-generational bonds, but also helps children understand their unique identity and who they are.

It is also at museums where children are first exposed to cultural diversity in a real-life context. Ms Karthigesu explains, "This



Local short films are projected in the Bedroom

is where they begin to learn values such as respect for others and their properties, [as well as] respect for others' beliefs and cultural practices."

## Learning Through PLAY

These benefits are clear to see at PLAY @ National Museum of Singapore (PLAY @ NMS), a new permanent children's wing at the National Museum. Designed for children aged three to seven, PLAY @ NMS — which was officially opened on 24 May 2014 by the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, Mr Lawrence Wong — offers an immersive experience in which young ones can discover Singapore's history and heritage in a fun and relatable way. This will hopefully mould them into a museum-going and heritage-loving generation.

The 700sqm play area is divided into three sections — EXPLORE, CREATE and PERFORM — which feature interactive exhibits and play-acting activities for pre-schoolers.

## Explore

The largest of the three spaces, this area is built around the concept of a home and is inspired by the National Museum's collection in a manner kids can appreciate.



Wannabe chefs in the Kitchen

The **Living Room** features a larger-than-life television and sofa set, from which you can watch your kids play with Chinese glove puppets or take a family photograph. There is also a radio with little buttons that children can press to hear old songs, and a film reel they can spin to watch past children's shows such as *Aksi Mat Yoyo*.

In the **Kitchen**, children can use food-shaped magnets to pick what ingredients go into making

iconic local dishes such as chilli crab. They can then hover over a toy stove and pretend to be chefs, or use a paper embossing machine to reproduce images of their favourite foods.

The **Bedroom** features a huge wardrobe filled with traditional costumes like the *kebaya* and *qipao*, which children can then 'try on' by looking at their reflection in the mirror. They can also crawl into a blanket-fort-like giant cloth tent to watch overhead projections of local short films and animations.


Did you know that there are more than 50 museums in Singapore?




TV stars in-the-making in the Living Room

## WHAT ELSE IS ON?

This year's Children's Season — jointly presented by NHB and the Museum Roundtable — may have ended on 29 June 2014, but several free exhibitions dedicated to the young and the young at heart are still ongoing! Two in particular deal with various aspects of heritage.

 **The League Against Evil: A DC Super Heroes exhibition** at the Singapore Philatelic Museum delves into the history and origins of DC Comics and the 'Justice League of America' team of superheroes. Held in conjunction with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Batman, highlights include limited-edition stamp books featuring Batman and other popular DC characters, rare original comic art pages and life-size busts of Batman and Superman. The exhibition runs daily until 31 August 2014.



 **Once Upon a Time in Asia: The Story Tree** is an exhibition for four to nine year-olds at the Asian Civilisations Museum that is centred on the age-old theme of the 'Tree of Life'. They will learn more about trees using all five senses, or go on a trail through the galleries to find out how this ancient concept is interpreted across different cultures. The exhibition runs daily until 2 November 2014.

Lastly, the **Garden** draws upon the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings made up of 19<sup>th</sup>-century paintings of local flora and fauna. Here, children can fit cut-out fruits and flowers onto a large puzzle tree. There is also an outdoor garden with real fruit trees, on which hang animal painting replicas from the Collection. There is even a chalkboard wall for kids to sketch anything they want, such as the animals on the trees.



Mr Lawrence Wong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth creating art with children at the Sundeck



Large cut-out flower pieces in the Garden

# Play

## Create

This room encourages pre-schoolers to be budding artists and use all sorts of materials to create their own artworks. Of particular interest to pre-school teachers is the wide range of guided activities held here, such as painting and paper craft workshops. Led by museum facilitators, these programmes are available on a booking-only basis.

## Perform

This room offers specially-curated pre-school programmes for young ones to unleash their creative potential in the performing arts. For instance, children can put on plays after touring the EXPLORE area. This will help improve their communication and performance skills as well as boost their confidence.

A modular stage and dividers allow the space to be easily transformed for different purposes, including as an exhibition venue during public events such as the annual Children's Season. ♥



## PLANNING A VISIT?

Located on Level 3 of the National Museum, PLAY @ NMS is open daily from 10am to 6pm and admission is free. However, the CREATE space is only open to the public from Fridays to Sundays, as other weekdays are set aside for school programmes. Likewise, members of the public can only enter the PERFORM space when special exhibitions are held there; at other times, it is reserved for school programmes.



# READ AND FIND OUT MORE!

These delightful books will help your child discover the local culture and customs of Singapore.

### ➤ JOHNNY CAN DREAM: A VISIT TO A PERANAKAN PLACE

By Benita Fong

One day, young Johnny discovers a magical spice pot called a *kamcheng* in an antique store, with surprising consequences. He is taken on a magical journey through time and space, and travels to the wonderful Peranakan Place. There, he meets a young Nonya girl and her father, Baba Pong Tay. They work together to solve a pineapple tart recipe mystery. Johnny is also introduced to a variety of delicious Peranakan dishes, beautiful costumes and traditional games like *cherki* and *chongkak*.

This charming and vividly-illustrated book offers children a glimpse into the richness of Peranakan customs and will definitely encourage young readers to discover this unique culture.

Contributed by Tse Ming Wai, Public Libraries Singapore



### ➤ STACEY GOES TO THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

By Lianne Ong

Join Stacey as she goes on a fantastical journey through the National Museum where colonial portraits wink at her and a 'magical' gibbon serves as her tour guide! You will learn about the rich history and heritage of Singapore such as the significance of 'The Mace of the City of Singapore' and even gold treasures from our very own Forbidden Hill! And can you believe it? Even durians have a place in our local heritage!

This easy-to-read and beautifully-illustrated book is ideally suited for children aged six to eight years old.

Contributed by Peter Chan, Librarian, National Library Board



Lounging on the giant sofa in the Living Room