

More than just a Lantern Festival

Celest Tham attended “A Better Tomorrow”, the Festival of Lights and found out the message behind this festival.



Visitor taking pictures of France themed lanterns at the “It’s A Small World” segment.
PHOTO: CELEST THAM

Jurong Lake Gardens was lit up with lanterns for 17 nights during holiday season not only to enliven people but also to support the President’s Challenge.

With the theme “A Better Tomorrow”, the Festival of Lights was organised hoping Singapore and the world to emerge from the crisis soon. Held in support of the President’s Challenge, it also aimed to light the unity, determination and resilience of Singaporeans while looking forward to a better and brighter future.

Being one of the biggest lantern festivals in Singapore in recent years, the festival featured 28 large scale outdoor lanterns designed in Singapore and hand-crafted by 100 professional lantern masters in China. After spending a month to complete, the

lanterns were packed in large containers and sent to Jurong Lake Gardens from China using land, rail and sea transport.

As the last lantern festival in 2020, it was different from the light-ups at Gardens by the Bay or Chinatown during Mid-Autumn Festival. It had showcased not only Chinese lantern sets but also a wide range of themes to allow different ethnic groups to come together to enjoy the intricate beauty of lanterns. The example would be the combination of astrological sign and Chinese horoscope lanterns with new year outlook and fortune.

One of the highlights was the “It's a Small World” lantern displays, where iconic landmarks representing each country were displayed. Visitors enjoyed transporting themselves around the world including the United States, Japan, China and more, when travel has come to a standstill amid Covid-19. Nonetheless, its educational value was also one of the reasons why families were mostly seen in the event.

At the “Charity Sky Lanterns and Water Lanterns”, it was where visitors could pen their wishes on a mini sky lantern or release a water lantern with a small donation of \$10. All proceeds from the sale of the lanterns would go towards the 72 benefitting agencies of President's Challenge 2020.

The festival also featured online performances and activities such as a virtual tour for those who did not wish to join the crowd to enjoy a series of performances from the comfort of their home.

When asked about the process of planning, it was revealed that initially, the event was solely a lantern festival.

The organising committee co-chairman Mr Lim Huan Chiang said: “We decided to hold this event during festive season to cheer people up and deliver hopes. At the same time, we also found that the President's Challenge was having a hard time in raising enough funds due to the pandemic, so we thought it would be a great idea to put them together.”

When talking about the difficulties and challenges, he shared that most of them were linked to the pandemic, for example raising funds during the economic downturn and the strict and complex government's post-pandemic restrictions.

“However, we are appreciated to have students from NUS Alumni and more joining us as volunteers. The support of manpower and goods from various groups means more than money.”

Ms Sam Wonh, described the festival as “attractive and impressive”.

“The light signifies hope which really stands for the hope we have that the future will get better,” the student said.

The lantern display was a feature at the gardens from 18 December 2020 till 3 January 2021, lighting up from 7pm to 11pm daily and was open to the public.