

# HYPE

#42

Feb-Jul 2016

Inch Chua  
*Music visions in solitude*

**SHAKESPEARE'S 400<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**  
HATE HIM OR LOVE HIM, HE LIVES

**XINYAO COMEBACK**  
ALL SET TO CREATE THE NEW WAVE

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## **ON THE COVER**



### **20 CREATING FABLES WITH MUSIC**

Local singer Inch Chua is bent on making Singapore music shine.

### **16 XINYAO: THE SECOND SPRING**

Is the resurgence of *Xinyao* attributed to SG50 or is it a seasonal occurrence?



### **22 ETERNAL ENTERTAINMENT**

It's been 400 years since the Bard left us. Nonetheless, Shakespeare's legacy lives on.

### **50 LIVIN' LA VIDA LOCAL**

Singaporean fashion designers break down the walls and parameters of the industry to do what they love.



### **78 TIANJIN SPECIAL**

Explore Tianjin where you can find that Taobao Street is not just for women; and there's a touch of the west in this Chinese city.



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## MUSIC



**10 Asian Musical Persuasion**  
Asian music is not something that you should look down on. We talk to the Asian acts of Laneway 2016.

**13 Bowie's Best**

**14 Rebels For Music**

## ARTS

**28 Bound to Theatre**

**30 Playing With Fire**



**32 Striking Poses At Soaring Heights**  
Aspiring models take urban exploration to new heights – literally.

## PRINT TO SCREEN



**34 Bad Guys Save The World**  
Supervillains are the new superheroes.

**36 Superhero Comics Fly**

**39 Pride & Prejudice – and a Zombie Apocalypse**

**40 Pledge Your Allegiance**

**41 The Return of the Monkey King**

## FEATURES

**42 Romancing the Outdoors**  
Spend Valentine's Day with your partner with these out-of-the-chocolate box ideas.

**45 The Relationship Reality Check**

**46 Rising Support For Singapore Designers**

**48 Passing the 10-year (Book)Mark**

**96 Books We Love**

# HYPE CONTENTS

## FASHION

**62 Fashion Cause & Effect**  
Who said fashion only meant looking good? These labels are more than just aesthetics.

**65 Barbers Go Slick**

## APPETITE

**66 Challenge For The Senses**

**68 Magic... Or Simply Science?**

**69 Sweets From The Heart**  
We hunt down the best Chinese New Year treats to satisfy your tastebuds.

**73 Asian Salad Spree**

## TRAVEL



**74 Unveiling The City Of Four Faces**  
Phnom Penh is a lot more modern than you imagined.

**76 Beach, You Got It**

**82 Travelling for Thrills**

## WIRED

**84 Blurring Boundary Between Real and Virtual**

**86 Drones Set to Soar**  
Just what are these new gadgets that's the rage in town?

## OPINION

**88 Are You Real on Social Media?**

**89 Human Interaction Declines As Smartphones Rise**

**90 Vigilantism in a Digital Age**

**91 Dialogues in Die-lects**

**92 Look Yourself in the Mirror**

**93 Volunteering for Cash**

**94 Waste Not... Regret Not**

**95 Reason Why You're Single**



# HYPE

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This is it. This is the year we celebrate our 20th birthday. HYPE is 20! Oh, how time flies. 20 years we've been here, 20 and more years we'll go.

For this issue, we've built many of our stories around the theme "Fearless".

Fearless doesn't mean the absence of fear. It doesn't mean being completely unafraid. Fearless is having the courage to overcome those fears. Fearless is living life in spite of fear. And that is what we seek to show you in #42. Because once you become Fearless, life becomes limitless.

Delve into the journey of Inch Chua and how she's convinced to expand the local music scene (p.20-21), or take a leap of faith and travel to beautiful Phnom Penh and see the wonders of Cambodia (p.74-75).

Enjoy the finer things in life by visiting amazing restaurants with relish (p.66-67). Go for only the delectable treats this Chinese New Year made by those who believe that you deserve the best – handmade (p.69-71).

It is also a special season for all those in love – or in love with love. With Valentine's Day just around the corner, we give you tips on how to step up your game (p.42-44).

Here's to many more firsts and many more great memories. Here's to HYPE.

*Frederick Law*  
**FREDERICK ASAPH LAW**  
**CONTRIBUTING DEPUTY EDITOR**

*Danial Gofar*  
**DANIAL GOFAR**  
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# ASIAN MUSICAL PERSUASION

ELIZABETH GOH and RACHEL YEO find out more about the Asian acts in Laneway 2016

St Jerome's Laneway Festival (Laneway) is well known as the music festival that brings a diversity of artists from around the globe right to Singapore's doorstep. From the lithe synthpop of Purity Ring to the poppy grittiness of Grimes, it's no wonder that this year's edition on Jan 30 was sold out to an audience of tens of thousands.

But with the vast popularity of such unique international musicians, there's also been an introduction of Asian ones, who are just as engaging as their counterparts. They bring their own flavour of home to Laneway, whether they're Hong Kongers or our very own Singaporeans. These are the four acts: GDJYB, Intriguant, Riot !n Magenta and Cashew Chemists.

## GDJYB: Inspired by Pressure

*Gai Dan Jing Yuk Bang*

1. A Hong Kong traditional dish comprising steamed egg with pork.
2. Also the name of Hong Kong's all-girl math-folk band, more commonly known by the acronym GDJYB.

Just like the steamed egg formed by the intense pressure of steam, some of GDJYB's songs are born out of the pressures of Hong Kong society. The citizens' unhappiness with the lack of political freedom shook the foundations of its government, spawning the 2014 Hong Kong protests, and subsequently the pro-democratic Umbrella Movement.

GDJYB's four members – vocalist Soft Liu, guitarist Soni Cheng, drummer Heihei Ng and bassist Yellow Yi (YY) Wong – are not staying silent about the unrest going on. One of their songs, *Burn It Down*, contains impassioned lines of, "We should take back the land / oblation sprinkles your blood", "This is what the people say / but I don't want to follow your tempo".

"The situation in HK (Hong Kong) is very complicated and confusing, a very complicated situation that you can't describe very easily. We feel somehow hopeless," explains Heihei.

Soft chimes in agreement. "The reason why a lot of our songs are based on social issues is because there is no way out and we cannot avoid it. There are too many ridiculous things happening in our society, and we feel we need to talk about it."

This eclectic math-folk mix of angular melodies, grounded with experimental

bass rhythms, is sung in Honglish (Cantonese and English) and is reminiscent at times of Elephant Gym and Chinese Football. In embracing the modern fusion of math-rock and folk, a clean and balanced sound forms the backing of GDJYB.

Though they find it a little bit of a challenge to break into the international indie music scene because of the language and cultural barrier, they seem to be picking up traction worldwide, having released their first album, *GDJYB*, in November 2014, and performed at Clockenflap, an annual music and arts festival held in Hong Kong, alongside acts like The Vaccines. They're also the first Hong Kong band to be invited to Laneway.

"We do love to write some love songs," Soft adds, chuckling, "but the things happening in Hong Kong, we cannot avoid it, so we still have to voice it out, unless Hong Kong becomes a good city."

## Intriguant: Creating Soundscapes

Think a synthesis of Bonobo's lush sampling and the atmospheric ambience of Four Tet. An intriguing, smooth blend of downtempo electronic mixes, interlaced with deep bass beats – that's what Singapore's music producer Intriguant gifted us with at this year's festival.

Louis Quek, the man behind this moniker, is one of the newest additions to local audio-visual collective Syndicate, which includes other well-known electronic names in the local

music scene like [.gif] and Kiat. A man wearing many hats, Louis is Lush 99.5's Creative Producer by day, and beat maestro by night – possibly Singapore's answer to Flume.

Under the record label Syndicate, Intriguant released his first EP (Extended Play) *Ellipse* in 2014. According to Syndicate, the release incorporates textual noises recorded over years in *Ellipse*, with a backbone of syncopated beats to explore the construct of human-perceived environments.

"It was a very progressive process where I wanted to create a specific atmosphere for the EP. The great thing about it was learning new things when I was creating it," he says.

Utilising recorded textual sounds to create music is something Intriguant has pursued further. In collaboration with visual artist SSYSTM, also known as Heider Ismail, a project called *Botanical Orchestra* was conceptualised. It aims to recreate Singapore's natural soundscape through field recordings of nature in areas like Bukit Timah Nature Reserve.

"We felt that the natural landscape of Singapore is depleting and getting excavated, making way for new urban development. We want to capture the soundscape of the environment and reconstruct it in our abilities to preserve its natural elements by producing these soundscapes," says Intriguant.

GDJYB





Riot !n Magenta



### Riot !n Magenta: Edgy, Distinctive Soul

They were the opening act for Scottish electronic band, Chvrches, when they performed in Singapore in November 2014. This time at Laneway, both bands have headlined the event together with 20 other music acts.

Most members from Riot !n Magenta are immensely dedicated to the ever growing local music industry, with four out of five members making tunes with other renowned local bands simultaneously. Lead singer Eugenia Yip lends her dreamy, mellifluous vocals to jazz funk band The Steve McQueens.

With Hayashida Ken (formerly of electronic pop duo Karl Maka), Khairyl Hashim (The Great Spy Experiment), Ritz Ang (The Summer State) and Sulaiman Supian (Obedient Wives Club) making up the rest of the electronic pop group, it has been an exhilarating ride for the quintet thus far. From their humble beginnings in 2011, they have since gotten countless opportunities to impress in music festivals like Baybeats 2011/2015, and through their latest EP, *Voices*. Now, they are proud to have graced the stage of the prestigious Laneway music festival for the first time.

"All of us have been going to the past few Laneway (festivals), and we would talk about how one day we would be on that stage. Finally this year we get the chance to do so," says drummer Ritz Ang.

Of course, their achievements do not just stop there as they look forward to always evolving and improving their music. And of course, to debunk the myth that locally produced music is not as spectacular compared to international music.

"[Laneway] will be a good chance for [festival-goers] to discover and find out that there are local talent in Singapore who are just as capable to be on par with the international acts," comments Ritz.

The band proves its capability to keep up by always trying to stay out of their comfort zones by constantly experimenting with their sounds, which they described as "distinctive soulful melodies lined with edgy, rhythmic beats" in their band biography.

Riot !n Magenta is currently recording their next EP, expected to be released around May this year. Fans can look forward to new sound changes with the next record.

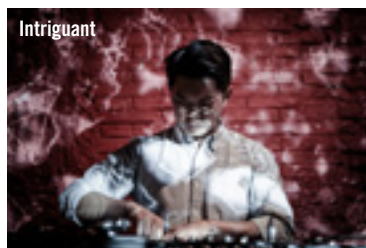
"The last EP (*Voices*) was a little bit dark, this time round we would like something more upbeat," says Ritz.

### Cashew Chemists: Fresh Tunes After Hiatus

Most renowned musicians may choose to take a hiatus in their highly demanding careers, but there is a possibility that they may never bounce back to the glory moments from their heydays. For indie-rock band Cashew Chemists, this is not the case.

Apart from lead vocalist Yuji Kumagai, Cashew Chemists are also Elliot Sng (bass), Brian Chia (guitar and backing vocals), Ulrich Chia (guitar)

Intriguing



Cashew Chemists



and Zachary Chia (drums). Back in top form after a three-year hiatus with the release of their latest EP, *Previously on...* Cashew Chemists last December, the band wasted no time to get their new tunes out for the public.

"We've been wanting to play (in Laneway) for a very long time, and now that we got it, it seems really surreal," says Yuji, adding that they were excited to catch overseas acts like Metz (Canada) and Thundercat (United States).

However, the climb to break through the music industry has been challenging, with Yuji explaining that the band was "in a little bit of a rut the last two years or so".

"We kept playing the same songs at same shows over and over again, got tired and wondered where our next artistic goal was next," he explained in another interview with DANamic.org.

Nonetheless, through constantly thinking of fresh ideas and working in a bigger artistic environment, the quintet persevered. And it seems like their efforts are paying off so far, with an opportunity to play in one of the largest music festivals.

Yuji says: "Laneway is pretty much the biggest thing that happened to us thus far, I guess it is only going to get bigger from here."

Photos courtesy of Laneway Festival Singapore  
Cashew Chemist by Jeanette Lim

# BOWIE'S BEST

Reminisce the rocking good times with CHIN YAN NI as she looks back at rock star David Bowie's life and reviews some of his best moments

With his multitude of alter egos – from Ziggy Stardust to Major Tom – if there were an ultimate chameleon, David Bowie would be it. Reinventing himself over and over again, Bowie revealed a different side of himself that the world never knew before. However, a part of him that we always knew and will always know is that in an industry that's known for manufacturing and cloning, Bowie was a true original genius.

After an 18-month long battle with cancer, David Bowie passed away at the age of 69 in January surrounded by his family. He left behind his legacy, and here's a look at some of his finest moments.

## 5 The Man Who Fell To Earth (1976)

Bowie's role in Nicholas Roeg's extra-terrestrial film was his first on the big screen, and also his most iconic one. Playing an alien who visits planet Earth and becomes a billionaire through humanity's greed and brutality, Bowie decided to retain this androgynous, intergalactic persona that he developed in the film, which stuck with him throughout his entire career.

## 4 Space Oddity (1969)

Bowie introduced Major Tom in this single, which was just another one of his alter egos. Released in 1969, the same year as the first moon landing, it was his first US hit that put him on the map. The music video also showcased his flexibility when it comes to performing, which made him a gender-bending artist to watch.

## 3 Changes (1972)

This song "started out as a parody of a nightclub song, a kind of throwaway," Bowie said. Who knew that it would become one of his top hits, constantly requested for? As long as there's a massive shift somewhere that took place in your life, this was the song to go to. It was also the very last song Bowie performed live before retiring from live shows in 2006.

## 2 Let's Dance (1983)

This was when Bowie finally began to embrace the mainstream. *Let's Dance* was proof that the artist was able to take influences from various genres and create his own style. It took Bowie's musical career to new heights, with the album going platinum both in the UK and US and the title track becoming one of his most loved tracks.

## 1 Lazarus (2015)

Released only a month before Bowie's passing, nobody would have guessed that the man was fighting for his life then – managing to write, record and release an album without anyone having a single clue about his struggle with cancer. "Look up here, I'm in heaven. I've got scars that can't be seen," sings Bowie.

Illustration by Vivien Low  
Pattern is a derivative of "White Wall" by Viahorizon  
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From left to right: Nathanael Dembélé, Oumar Toure, Aliou Toure, Garba Toure

# Rebels for Music

RACHEL YEO and TAN JIN HENG speak to Songhoy Blues who became exiles for the love of Western music

Desert blues music group Songhoy Blues had to go through life and death in order to grace different stages around the world, including the inaugural Neon Lights music festival in Singapore last November.

In 2012, the band was forced to flee from their home, 11,838km away from Singapore, in conflicted Mali. Armed jihadists had captured a large swathe of land in the country's north, taking control of the media and banning Western music, deeming it "satanic". Death threats were issued against musicians – including Songhoy Blues – that sent many of them into exile. The band is made up of drummer Nathanael Dembele, guitarist Garba Toure, lead singer Aliou Toure and second guitarist Oumar Toure.

The absence of music with the imposed rule across its controlled territories was a sharp contrast against the golden heyday of Malian music, which produced prominent musicians such as singer and multi-instrumentalist Ali Farka Toure.

"In Mali, we [used to] listen to music from everywhere, from Jimi Hendrix to Jay-Z to Kanye West," Aliou Toure reminisces during a group interview. "You can go to a club in Mali and hear music from America."

The band combines influence of prominent Western artists like Led Zeppelin, fused with traditional African music that shapes their musical style today.

Despite the ban, the quartet refused to put down their voices and music instruments without a fight. The defiance against the jihadists and determination to keep Malian music playing formed the basis of their debut album, "Music In

*"If we're on stage in Europe, America or Singapore, we see people smiling and happy. Sometimes we ask ourselves why can't the people from Africa be happy like these people here?"*

*- Aliou Toure, lead singer*

Exile" which was universally acclaimed and was performed internationally to full houses across Europe.

In order to raise awareness about banned music in Mali in other parts of the world, they have also starred in the documentary "They Have To Kill Us First" to highlight the musicians' courage in their fight against the music ban and their hope for the return of music to their homeland. The documentary was well received by international audiences and was screened at the Singapore International Film Festival in November last year.

"We need to be together, all people, all countries!" insists Oumar Toure, emphasising with wild hand gestures.

"Today the situation is in Africa, tomorrow the situation can move to America, to Paris, to Asia. We need this movie to



show people what's happening in 2012 so we can fight in this situation," Garba Toure adds.

It is clear that the group is enjoying global success even as its homeland continues to suffer. In November last year, a luxury hotel in Mali was subjected to a terror attack, leaving more than 20 dead. At that time, Songhoy Blues was merely a week away from performing at Singapore.

"If our first president Modibo Keita were here, would he be proud of the new generation in Mali? They [first generation Malian leaders] used to build this country for us and we don't think they should be proud of what's happening in Mali right now," says Aliou.

The incident made the group realise that the efforts they went through to rebel against terrorism are beginning to be understood by the rest of the world. This is what motivates them to carry on with their vision that music should not be banned anytime, anywhere.

Even after establishing an international fan base in countries like the United Kingdom, and now in Singapore, it is still an opportunity for them to perform at where their roots are formed in the first place – back in Mali.

"If we're on stage in Europe, America or Singapore, we see people smiling and happy. Sometimes we ask ourselves why can't the people from Africa be happy like these people here?" Aliou says.

Nonetheless, Songhoy Blues' members still remain optimistic to spread their songs to their hometown's audiences one day.

"It is a big hope for us to make everybody in Mali smile [through our performances]," Oumar adds. "Maybe the situation will be better then, but I'm already so excited to play there!"

## Stellar Headliners

Here are some of the acts that stood out during the first ever Neon Lights Festival:

### CHIC FEAT. NILE RODGERS

Nile Rodgers is a legendary music composer, producer, arranger and guitarist with an illustrious career whereby his music backed four decades of pop anthems. Nile Rodgers' success with Daft Punk has cemented his position as one of the most respected figures in the EDM community. His infectious 70s style performance with his band CHIC were capable of making audiences of all ages groove.

### MOGWAI

Mogwai was formed in Glasgow, Scotland in 1996 with long time friends Stuart Braithwaite, guitarist Dominic Aitchison, and drummer Martin Bulloch with the goal of "creating serious guitar music", and another guitarist John Cummings was later added to the group. The rock band debuted with its first single "Tuner", a rarity among Mogwai's music for its prominent vocals.

### DAMIEN RICE

The Irish singer-songwriter was born on the outskirts of Dublin in the 1970s and launched his music career in the late 90s. His album "O" has since achieved platinum status in Ireland and his constant performances and support from music groups make him a "must-see" live act among audiences. Rice was definitely a fan favourite during the festival and he even shared a few glasses of wine to two lucky fans when performing hit single "Cheers Darlin".



# XINYAO: THE SECOND SPRING

CHIN YAN NI, RIZQINA MAHDZAR and TEO ZI LIN explore the resurgence of *Xinyao* during Singapore's Golden Jubilee last year to see if it's a seasonal occurrence or heritage that's here to stay

During the 2014 National Day rally speech, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong caught attendees by surprise when he sang the opening line of a classic *Xinyao* song. Nostalgia filled the air as the lyrics from *Xi Shui Chang Liu* (Friendship Forever), composed by *Xinyao* pioneer Liang Wern Fook, reverberated through the auditorium.

*Xinyao*, short for *Xin Jia Po Ge Yao*, refers to Chinese folk music created in Singapore by Singaporeans. The PM's spontaneous vocal act was used to emphasise the importance of using this movement to create opportunities for Singaporeans to realise their dreams.

In the past few years, *Xinyao* has experienced a resurgence of sorts, especially during the nation's Golden Jubilee. During the SG50 celebrations last year, *Xinyao* blossomed into a full spectrum of programmes – concerts featuring the pioneers of *Xinyao*, TV shows and movies – were organised and created around this theme.

A recent example is the MediaCorp Channel 8 drama called *Crescendo*. In the show, three young men – played by Tay Ping Hui, Christopher Lee and Darren Lim – passionate about creating music, came together to form a group, and eventually turned it into a recording label company called *Crescendo*. The other main characters are played by Ann Kok, Cynthia Koh and Jacelyn Tay.

Riding on the hype of the drama, a concert was also organised in November last year as an extension of the *Crescendo* series. The three-

hour long musical performance saw veteran *Xinyao* singers such as Liang and Lee Wei Song, alongside new talents like Bonnie Loo and Chriz Tong.

In an interview with Channel NewsAsia, Liang, who is largely known as one of the pioneers of *Xinyao* who rose to fame in the 1980s and 1990s, said: "I hope more people get the chance to better understand *Xinyao* through this concert and see that it is not just about familiar nostalgic Singaporean music from the 1980s."

Liang, 51, is also a prolific Singaporean singer-songwriter, who has written more than 200 songs for renowned artistes such as Jacky Cheung, Leon Lai, and Andy Lau.

***"I hope more people get the chance to better understand Xinyao through this concert and see that it is not just about familiar nostalgic Singaporean music from the 1980s."***

- Liang Wern Fook

Lee Wei Song



## The First Wave: Love for Music Fuels Students

In the mid-1980s, the first wave of *Xinyao* started hitting local shores when the Campus Folk Song Movement from Taiwan spread to the little red dot. Taking inspiration from this foreign genre, Singaporeans started adapting these songs to fit the local context, which led to the birth of *Xinyao*.

Decked in their uniforms, students from junior colleges and polytechnics started forming their own singing interest groups, glocalising Chinese folk songs. Songwriting competitions were organised frequently, where young hopefuls entered their names in hopes of becoming the next big act. Students also composed local ballads, weaving their memories, life experiences, and aspirations into the songs.

"People who sang *Xinyao* were students. They just forged friendships, gathered around, and composed their own songs. They didn't expect it to be a hit – it was just about friendships and their love for music," says Ms Alicia Tang, marketing manager of The Ark, a Chinese music cafe here.

A unique genre that resonates with Singaporeans' way of life, *Xinyao* has a distinctive style that is different from mainstream music. Made up of clean acoustics and harmonised vocals, the soothing melodies are usually played on the guitar.

"*Xinyao*'s style of music is at a grassroots level, created by youth for youth. Typically, it has a short pitch range of one octave or less," says Mr Edmund Ng, 42, who was part of the third generation of students to be involved in *Xinyao*.

***"People who sang Xinyao were students. They just forged friendships, gathered around and composed their own songs. They didn't expect it to be a hit – it was just about friendships and their love for music."***

- Ms Alicia Tang

## The Second Wave: Ballads Go Pop and Abroad

With the onset of globalisation and technology, *Xinyao* subsequently developed into Singapore Chinese Popular Songs.

Ms Tang explains that there was a revolution of the local Chinese music scene when the trend of Mandarin popular songs, such as those composed by Jay Chou, became popular in Singapore. Technology allowed the youth to access programs and devices that spurred them to experiment with music.

"Because of technology, music arrangements in local Chinese music have become very intricate," says Ms Tang. Instead of the usual harmonious style of music heard in *Xinyao*, pop songs are more upbeat, with complex chords and musical accompaniment.

Chinese pop songs made popular by Singaporean artistes such as JJ Lin, Stefanie Sun, Tanya Chua and Olivia Ong, propelled the second wave of *Xinyao* into the international and regional arena.

Despite a distinct difference in the two waves of *Xinyao*, in an interview with Channel NewsAsia, Liang said: "As long as it is innovative music with a strong Singaporean flavour and it is created by Singaporeans, it is *Xinyao*. The time period is irrelevant. We have a whole new generation of Singapore artistes creating music like that and I hope people will notice them."



### **Xinyao Now: As Things Evolve...**

After a long reign of pop songs dominating the Chinese music sphere, *Xinyao* finally regained its spot in the limelight in March last year, with one of its largest concerts ever, featuring more than 100 Singaporean performers.

As a tribute to the genre and its place in Singapore's heritage, "Our *Xin Yao* Concert" showcased some of *Xinyao*'s most celebrated singers, including Li Feihui. Having written countless songs over the past two decades, Li currently grooms aspiring artists in his own music school.

"I was the first full-time professional songwriter in Singapore. It didn't seem viable back then but I believed we should strive for our dreams. Only then would our lives be meaningful. If Singapore does not have its own music industry, why don't we create one, instead of waiting around for things to happen," said Li in an article written by musicSG.

In April last year, Liang held his first solo *Xinyao* concert – "For Music, For Life". According to an article on TODAYonline, all 5,000 tickets sold out within six hours at the launch of ticket sales.

Additionally, annual *Xinyao* concerts such as Chong Feng (Reunion) are held every year, organised by companies such as TCR Music Station. These concerts have managed to garner a strong following over the years.

Several cafes in Singapore also provide *Xinyao* singers with a platform to perform, including the MusicDreamer Live! Cafe at APERIA in Kallang and The Ark at Bugis Cube.

"It is a good thing that *Xinyao* has finally been given the acknowledgement of the legacy it has left and the impact it has had on the music industry," said award-winning singer-songwriter Eric Moo in a 2014 article in The New Paper.

However, even with all the hype surrounding *Xinyao* over the past few years, Moo believes that it will never be as popular as before.

"Times have evolved. Whether it is our thinking, the genres of music that we are all exposed to, it's all very different now," he said in the same article.



**"It has the potential to be a very encouraging, novel platform. But as local Chinese songwriting and singing is something not often heard of or talked about today, it seems to be a very daunting thing to experiment or try."**

- Ong Shi Ri



**"Times have evolved. Whether it is our thinking, the genres of music that we are all exposed to, it's all very different now."**

- Eric Moo

### **The Future: More Structure Needed**

Mr Ng agrees with Moo. He thinks that in order for *Xinyao* to remain relevant, there needs to be a lot of changes to make the scene more 'current'.

"Most of the singers involved in the first wave of *Xinyao* are not that active anymore. Of course there are some occasions or concerts, but then the people who are attending those concerts are people of that generation. They're not able to tap into newer generations, to attract new talents from among the youth," says Mr Ng.

In a survey conducted by HYPE with more than 100 youths, 94 per cent of respondents aged 18 to 24 believe that there is a lack of awareness about *Xinyao* amongst young Singaporeans. It is not surprising that 64 per cent of respondents have never heard of *Xinyao* before.

"With the Internet, the younger generation tend to lean towards international songs ranging from English to Korean pop, deviating from Mandopop, much less to say *Xinyao*. The interest in locally produced compositions has also been dwindling," says polytechnic student Amelia Chua, 19.

"It has the potential to be a very encouraging, novel platform. But as local Chinese songwriting and singing is something not often heard of or talked about today, it seems to be a very daunting thing to experiment or try," says polytechnic student Ong Shi Ri, 19.

Even though *Xinyao* has been affirmed as part of Singapore's cultural heritage by the National Heritage Board, Mr Ng points out that that there is no structure in the way the *Xinyao* scene is handled in Singapore.

"There is no proper organisation where you can go to, to find out everything about the current and upcoming events of *Xinyao*," says Mr Ng. A non-profit organisation, *Xinyao* Organisation Singapore, used to update *Xinyao* events on its website. However, it has been inactive since the end of 2011.



Liang Wern Fook

**"We don't want to lose something of heritage; once it's gone, it's gone."**

- Mr Edmund Ng



### **Classic Xinyao Songs**

1. *Zui Hou De Yi Shou Ge* (The Final Song) by Liang Su Shan

2. *Xi Shui Chang Liu* (Friendship Forever) by Liang Wern Fook

3. *Wo Men Zhe Yi Ban* (Our Class) by Dawn Gan

4. *Zhi You Ni Neng Wan Cheng Wo De Ge* (Only You Can Complete My Song) by Li Fei Hui

5. *Kopi-O* by Eric Moo

6. *Rang Ye Qing Qing Luo Xia* (As The Night Falls Gently) by Pan Ying

7. *Wo Hai Zai Shi Jie De Bei Hou Xiang Ni* (I Am Still Thinking Of You Behind The World) by Hong Shao Xuan

8. *Wen Rou De Ye* (The Gentle Night) by Deng Miao Hua

9. *Xie Hou* (Encounter) by Huang Hui Zhen and Eric Moo

10. *Lian Zhi Qi* (Love's Refuge) by Jiang Hu

### **Saving Xinyao: Back to School**

In the same survey, 45 per cent feel that more television dramas revolving around the *Xinyao* theme, such as *Crescendo*, would entice people to embrace the *Xinyao* culture more. The other 55 per cent think that there should be more attention given to *Xinyao*, such as including *Xinyao* singers as part of MediaCorp's new year countdown line-up of performers.

"The Chinese music scene in Singapore is not as strong as the others. For example, during major music festivals in Singapore, such as Baybeats, you don't see as much Chinese singers as English bands," says Ms Gao Xiao Ding, 26, a regular *Xinyao* singer at The Ark.

Ms Jeanette Ng, 30, a planning executive and another frequent singer at The Ark, believes that in order to promote *Xinyao*, its songs can be rearranged to suit modern tastes.

"They should reconstruct songs so that they sound more vivid. For example, before *Crescendo*, a lot of people didn't know what *Xinyao* was. But after watching the drama, they know more local songs, because the classics were remade. In the past, *Xinyao* was very slow paced. By modifying songs to be more upbeat, they will attract the youth more," says Ms Ng.

Ms Gao adds: "We can also incorporate English elements inside *Xinyao* music and make it bilingual, so that it will become more relevant for the youth today."

In order to to promote *Xinyao* effectively, 65 per cent of youths feel that *Xinyao*-related activities in schools, such as forming *Xinyao* clubs and holding *Xinyao* competitions in schools, would provide them opportunities to be involved in the *Xinyao* culture.

"In the past, when *Xinyao* was really active, Yishun Junior College used to organise *Xinyao* competitions, like songwriting contests, for all the schools in Singapore, regardless of whether they are tertiary or secondary schools. If the schools nowadays can get more involved in organising these types of competitions or concerts again, then the scene would become vibrant," explains Mr Ng.

"We don't want to lose something of heritage; once it's gone, it's gone."





## CREATING FABLES WITH MUSIC

Inch Chua is not just bent on making her own music but also in making Singapore music shine, as ELIZABETH GOH discovers

The young Inch Chua envisioned herself as a bold and gutsy criminal investigation detective, bashing down doors and doing all sorts of dangerous things. Today, although she has become the musician she never dreamt she would be, that same brave heart still pumps hard – for music.

The indie singer-songwriter, at age 27, has already produced two solo albums, three solo EPs, opened shows for the likes of Vampire Weekend and The Naked and Famous, and was the first Singaporean act to be invited to perform at the prominent South by Southwest (SXSW) music festival in Texas. She moved to the United States in 2011 to pursue her passion for music, but has returned home with a mindset to champion local music.

### Rooting for Singapore Music

Inch was 14 when a boy asked her out to watch his band's gig. After the concert, she knew she was smitten. She'd fallen passionately in love - but not with her date. As a student who listened to only the Top 40s, she never expected a diversity of music to exist beyond radio, much less locally. The next few years were spent using her pocket money to buy local albums and concert tickets. By 18, she was playing her own shows as the front woman of the indie rock band Allura. At 19, she started Invasion with her friend, Hyder Albar.

As a community-focused business, Invasion uses research to develop the local music scene by targeting more than

38,000 youths through their events every year. One key event is the SCAPE Invasion Tour, which is a series of music concerts held in secondary and tertiary institutes to showcase local artists such as Gentle Bones, Shigga Shay and Take Two. These tours reached a whopping number of 32 secondary schools a year. Inch hopes that by 2017, every secondary school in Singapore will have been exposed to local music.

The purpose behind the SCAPE Invasion Tour lies in educating the young about the local music scene. In a society that places a huge emphasis on grades, Inch wishes to stress the importance of the arts.

"We've geared up our children from a young age that the only thing important in life is their PSLE numbers. It's important to start just allowing them to have the mechanics to even appreciate art; there's a need to start developing the headspace for that. If not they're going to grow up to be robots, which is the case sometimes," Inch explains.

Inch's passion as an artiste is fuelled by her duty to teach as many of these youths as possible about the vast local music community. She refuses to sit still and watch them being confined to a certain type of music, or a life without music at all.

"Usually when I meet someone and they've never heard of local music I would joke and ask, 'Which rock have you

been living under?' They'd say, 'No lah, normal people don't listen to local music', and I'll ask them, 'Do you really want to be normal?' I think it's my responsibility as an artiste to educate people who don't understand it. Because if I don't, who will? It's not anyone else's job but the artiste," she says firmly.

"I can't imagine being a 14-year-old and not given the opportunity to explore some alternative. But I'm looking at this stage, with Invasion, to be able to find kids like me who have the opportunity to be impacted. In the past, obviously no parents were going to let a 14-year-old go out wandering to a gig, especially if you came from a conservative family. So now, let me bring the gig to you."

Inch didn't stop there. Together with Esther Lowless, a multi-disciplinary musician, she created a bi-annual show celebrating women artists all over Singapore. Last October, four musicians, Lisa Haryono, Kim Eun Hyung, Esther and Inch herself played at SingJazz club for their first show, the *Xiao Zar Bor* (XZB) Movement. In Hokkien, *Xiao Zar Bor* means 'crazy woman'.

Inch explains, "I think at some point of time in life, both Esther and I, whenever we focused on our creative craft, people called us crazy, like we're suddenly trying too hard. But when a guy does it, it's not that big a deal. When a guy writes about his heartbreaks, it's not that big a deal. A girl writes about her heartbreaks and she's suddenly Taylor Swift. There is a bit of a double standard sometimes, I feel."

"Maybe some girls out there really want to try and do their thing, but they somehow felt deterred because suddenly

*"I think it's my responsibility as an artist to educate people who don't understand it (local music). Because if I don't, who will? It's not anyone else's job but the artiste."*

- Inch Chua

they're desperate, suddenly they're trying too hard, they're crazy for wanting to do this, and they get discouraged. Maybe starting a movement like this is important to encourage those girls that need that extra push."

### Finding Inspiration in Solitude

One wouldn't expect Inch to embrace the feeling of being alone, having performed to crowds locally and internationally, and speaking at TEDx conferences both in Washington and Singapore. But her independent stay in Pulau Ubin for four months proved otherwise.

The stint was inspired when Inch was talking with her music peers who felt that one couldn't find inspiration in Singapore, but had to seek revelations in picturesque countries overseas. This led her to Pulau Ubin to compose her folktronica EP, *Letters to Ubin*.

During one of her night walks around Pulau Ubin, she caught a glimpse of an endangered lesser mouse deer. This diminutive animal, the object of Malay folklore for its gutsy spirit, captivated her and sparked off the track *MouseDeer*. In writing the song, she explored themes of living an endangered lifestyle, which to her meant taking the road less travelled, living a "life meant for fables", or a life that would eventually produce "great stories, legends and morals".

She adds, "In solitude I'm least alone – I really do love travelling alone. I think I just grew up a bit of a lonely kid and I think I've always been left alone for a long time, so I always felt that it almost feels like normal for me to be wandering alone in places. You always learn new things on expeditions when you're on your own. I think it's about self-discovery, and the only way you can do that is to put yourself out of your comfort zone."

Inch is clearly not one to shy away from seeking independent adventure. Last December, she took a 17-day trek up Mount Everest to its base camp.

"Coming down was the best part, not because I got to go home, but when you're up there so high, nothing lives, nothing survives, it's just barren wasteland. But when you start coming down, and the altitude starts to drop, life slowly comes back again from little shrubs to trees, trees to birds and animals and wildlife. When you turn around and you look back to the highest point you were, it looks amazing, it looks so beautiful," she reminisces.

"That's it – ambition looks great from afar, but maybe it's not about being at the top, but finding your sweet spot. It's got to be that sweet spot where you have a vantage point, but there's still life around you and you can still breathe. I'm closer than I was before; I would admit that I'm definitely happy with where I am today."





# Eternal Entertainment



An adaptation of Shakespeare's King Lear by Taiwan's Contemporary Legend Theatre

Photo courtesy of Eoin Carey

This year marks the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death. To love or not to love the Bard is the question in many students' minds as his works remain *de rigueur* literature texts in Singapore schools. **CHARISSA JOY NG, RACHEL YEO and SARAH RACHEL TEO** find out why Shakespeare continues to influence those who love him

*"To be or not to be. That is the question."*

*"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears."*

*"Oh Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?"*

You may neither love nor know William Shakespeare, yet you are probably able to spout these lines at random. We certainly can neither ignore nor forget him as Singapore schools and tertiary institutions continue to put him on a pedestal.

This year marks the 400th year of Shakespeare's death. But as ironic as it seems, we continue to be in awe of his literary greatness, living vicariously through his works which are still as entertaining as they were four centuries years ago, or even better.

It's no wonder the world is celebrating through a series of events (see *Shakespeare Lives*).

Shakespeare has influenced many incredible writers after his time. Charles Dickens has called Shakespeare "the great master who knew everything" and whose plays are an "unspeakable source of delight", according to the Japan Dickens Fellowship. More than 25 book titles of Dickens' were taken from Shakespeare, and a variety of Shakespeare's quotes are used throughout Dickens' works.

Shakespeare also played a major role in shaping modern English, creating over 1,700 words we use today. As Hephzibah Anderson of BBC Culture once wrote, even if one has not seen a Shakespearean play, they would still use simple words like "eyeball" to phrases like "all of a sudden". As evolution of the language progressed, so did the value of his works.

We can still relate to his philosophies on life, as seen in his poems and plays. In the world of theatre, whether it is Hamlet by The Globe, or an outdoor performance of Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare's works still garner a lot of attention and interest.

Ms Charlotte Nors, executive director of the Singapore Repertory Theatre (SRT), said: "Shakespeare talks about the big human emotions like love, envy, hatred. Those feelings and human emotions haven't changed at all."

SRT has partnered with the Esplanade and Royal Shakespeare Company in Shakespearean productions such as King Lear starring Ian McKellen in 2007 and Sam Mendes' The Bridge Project that saw sizeable audiences. "Shakespeare's work belongs to the world now," Ms Nors exclaimed. "There is, after all, a reason, why his works are still being staged in all corners of the world, right?"

Indeed, people everywhere are performing, writing and reinterpreting works that Shakespeare has created.

"People are now more interested in Shakespeare adaptations," said Associate Professor Walter Lim, who teaches literature at the National University of Singapore. He added: "His works are still very strong, and they are going in different directions."

This has spun off many modern takes of his creations to fit in various societies. Take India's version of Macbeth, which they named Maqbool. Instead of being set in the Elizabethan times of the 16th Century, it depicts Mumbai's underground scene.

The Japanese film version of King Lear, while faithful to the original plot,

***"People are now more interested in Shakespeare's adaptations. His works are still very strong, and they are going in different directions."***

- Walter Lim, NUS Associate Professor



Othello (2013), Shakespeare in the Park

Photos courtesy of Singapore Repertory Theatre  
Texture designed by Freepik



focuses instead on a ruthless Japanese warlord with his three sons. The title, Ran, meaning chaos, summarises the main idea of the film.

Renowned actors have also immersed themselves in modern Shakespearean productions one way or another. Denzel Washington, a three-time Golden Globe Award winner, played Don Pedro in the 1993 film Much Ado About Nothing; and heartthrob Leonardo DiCaprio wooed Juliet's heart as Romeo in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film.

The recent Macbeth movie that starred two of today's biggest stars, Marion Cotillard and Michael Fassbender, received positive reviews, earning six nominations for the British Independent Film Awards. Clearly, the themes and issues in Shakespeare's works still offer insight into the human condition even in modern times.

A newly launched campaign, Shakespeare Lives, introduced a global social media movement called Play Your Part, in line with the anniversary. It started on Twelfth Night (Jan 5), where celebrities share their favourite Shakespearean plays and quotes on video.

This is the beauty of Shakespeare's works, where adaptations show the diverse culture around the world, capturing the essence of the original plot. This is evidently seen in the Asian adaptations created in the 21st century (see Shakespeare Adaptations).

Shakespeare may never write new scripts with the classic quill and paper, or stage another theatrical play but it is telling that there are still many who wish to carry on what he's bestowed to the world.

"The only way to really keep Shakespeare alive is doing Shakespeare, performing Shakespeare, going to Shakespeare, talking about Shakespeare," said Mr Philip Anthony McConnell, a master teacher at the English Language Institute of Singapore.

It seems that Shakespeare is still to be after all.

# Shakespeare Adaptations

We have seen so many different entertaining plays, small and big screen adaptations of Shakespeare. Here are some interesting Asian interpretations of his works to recommend:

**Kumonosu-Jo**, directed by Akira Kurosawa. Meaning "throne of blood" in Japanese, this is a 1957 film adaptation of Macbeth, which discusses betrayal and power in 15th century Japan.

**The Banquet**, a 2006 Chinese film that is a loose adaptation of Hamlet. The film won two out of five nominations at the 43rd Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan.

**Prince of the Himalayas**, another 2006 Chinese film adapted from Hamlet, directed by Sherwood Hu.

**Frivolous Wife**, is a 2008 South Korean romantic comedy film based on The Taming of the Shrew, one of the best-loved comedies.

**Maqbool**, as obvious as its name, is a 2004 film adaptation of Macbeth, introducing India's underworld. Directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, it is his first Shakespearean film, winning him international acclaim.

**Omkara**, a 2006 adaptation that Vishal Bhardwaj created from Othello. The film bagged seven awards from the Filmfare Awards, receiving many other accolades from various film festivals as well.

# Shakespeare Lives

## Activities in Singapore

**Shakespeare Lives touring exhibition with the National Library Board**  
A touring Shakespeare Lives exhibition at various public libraries in partnership with the National Library Board to bring an increased knowledge of the literature great's life.  
*Various libraries around Singapore*  
*Mar 15 to Sep 30 2016*

**Shakespeare film festival, featuring the best of Shakespeare on film**  
The British Council, in partnership with The Arts House, will bring to you the various Shakespearean films that have a fresh insight into his works.  
*The Arts House*  
*From Apr 24 2016*

**Shakespeare in the Park presented by Singapore Repertory Theatre**  
Romeo & Juliet is presented by Singapore Repertory Theatre at Fort Canning Park. Directed by internationally renowned director, Daniel Slater, Shakespeare in the Park promises to be the outdoor cultural event of the year.  
*Fort Canning Park*  
*Apr 27 to May 22 2016*

**Hamlet screening by National Theatre Live**  
Academy Award® nominee Benedict Cumberbatch (BBC's Sherlock, The Imitation Game,) takes on the title role of Shakespeare's great tragedy. Directed by Lyndsey Turner (Posh, Chimerica) and produced by Sonia Friedman Productions.  
*Esplanade - Esplanade Theatres on the Bay*  
*Apr 23 and 24 2016*

**Shaking it with Shakespeare**  
An exhibition and programmes at the museum will bring to life the world of Shakespeare through stamps, philatelic materials, interactive exhibits, 3D objects and other events and workshops.  
*Singapore Philatelic Museum*  
*May 2016 to March 2017*

**Public talks and workshops by prominent Shakespeare expert**  
Hosted by the British Council, the public talks and workshops will explore Shakespeare's influence on creative arts and modern culture, in which Singapore's most iconic Shakespearean thespian, Adrain Pang, will participate.  
*Costa Coffee 313@Somerset*  
*Apr 23 2016*

## Activities Around The World

**Royal Opera House, Live Cinema Season in Spain**  
Catch exciting Shakespeare productions like Romeo and Juliet in over 70 cinemas across Spain.  
*Sep 22 2015 - Dec 31 2016*

**Hamlet at the Helena Modrzejewska National Stary Theatre in Krakow, Poland**  
Polish director Krzysztof Garbaczewski sets to impress audiences with his visual imagination in Hamlet.  
*Dec 1 2015 - Feb 21 2016*

Join the social media conversation all over the world by using the hashtags **#ShakespeareLives** and **#PlayYourPart**. Check out award-winning photos on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and explore the different poisons and potions used by Shakespeare's most iconic characters. (source: [shakespearelives.org](http://shakespearelives.org))



Poster of Shakespeare in the Park



Poster of Hamlet screening



Stamps that will be displayed at 'Shaking it with Shakespeare'



# *It's too hard!*

Archaic, complex, tough, and hard to understand.

These were common comments from students from secondary to tertiary levels.

Which might also be why there has been a drop in the number of students taking literature as a subject, “as it has become an option, and often a third wheel to Social Studies,” said Mr Richard Angus Whitehead, Assistant Professor at the National Institute of Education.

Though most of the students interviewed generally enjoyed studying Shakespeare, the “language was sometimes convoluted or difficult to understand”, said Ariwan Kai, 18, of Raffles Institution (Junior College).

Ezra Lim, 16, who studied Romeo and Juliet for his ‘O’ Levels, added: “I had to rely a lot on the explanations given (by teachers) and learn a bit of old English and its meanings.”

Just as how students find it hard to grasp the Shakespearean texts, it is also tough to teach one.

“Shakespeare texts are written in iambic pentameter – it’s actually blank verse,” said Mrs Vimala Alexander, a retired literature teacher of 30 years.

Each line is skillfully crafted to fit 10 syllables, with five strong beats. “And then some of them speak in prose,” she added. Thus, it is difficult to teach the language to students, to “tell them what is funny” and explain the puns while getting clueless stares.

Shakespeare’s tragedies and comedies are often compared when teaching literature in secondary school. As students rarely get the jokes in centuries old comedies, Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) Secondary opts for other plays when Shakespeare’s comedies are offered.

“The comedies are more difficult to impart to the kids. Whereas the tragedies, I think the themes are universal,” explained Mrs Alexander.

“It is absolutely painful to teach them how to laugh!” added Ms Nicole Teo jokingly, a CHIJ teacher of 14 years.

She also felt that because of “cultural disconnections”, students may find it harder to understand as the plays were written for the Elizabethan audience. Nonetheless, certain schools still want to teach them, due to the diverse themes and values offered in Shakespeare’s stories that can provide life lessons to students.

Themes like ‘love conquers all’ in Romeo and Juliet, and ambition and power in Julius Caesar, the most recent ‘O’ Level texts, are “good universal themes to teach,” said Mrs Magdalen Low, a literature teacher of 34 years.

“Shakespeare’s plays explore personal values such as family ties, love and friendship, even as they present national and global issues, such as leadership in troubled times,” said the Ministry of Education in a statement.

Annmaria Catherine Patteri, 20, an English Literature student at Stansfield College, said: “We still struggle with these issues in modern society and these plays are capable of making us see different points of view.”

Ultimately, Shakespeare is able to broaden a student’s global knowledge, hone the language and learn about past issues that are still very prevalent today.

Said Mrs Alexander, 61, when she talks to her ex-students on social media: “I would say that most of my students were inspired by literature. In that case, I will take it to mean Shakespeare. And they said that they picked up the love for language by studying Shakespeare.”

***“Shakespeare’s plays explore personal values such as family ties, love and friendship, even as they present national and global issues, such as leadership in troubled times.”***

*- Ministry of Education*



# **WHAT SHAKESPEARE’S LEGACY MEANS TO YOU**



**Philip Anthony McConnell**  
Master Teacher, English Language  
Institute of Singapore

“The only way to really keep Shakespeare alive is doing Shakespeare, performing Shakespeare, going to Shakespeare, talking about Shakespeare.”



**Charlotte Nors**  
Executive Director, Singapore  
Repertory Theatre

“Even Taylor Swift has a song about Romeo & Juliet!”



**Walter Lim**  
Associate Professor, National University  
of Singapore

“He still seems to be very much appreciated by the common man as well as by the academics.”



**Dominique Yap, 18**  
Raffles Institution (Junior College)

“A legendary playwright who has inspired many writers like Charles Dickens and Agatha Christie.”



**Rebecca Anne Dendroff, 19**  
Ngee Ann Polytechnic

“His plays... also [have] been adapted into TV shows such as The Hollow Crown. I believe this is how Shakespeare’s legacy is still kept alive because everyone watches TV!”



**Tan Fong Han, 18**  
Raffles Institution (Junior College)

“He’s become more of a household name because people know about him but don’t study his works.”



**Erza Lim, 16**  
St. Patrick’s Secondary

“He has been an inspiration to many writers.”



**Estelle Tan, 16**  
CHIJ St Nicholas Girls

“A treasure trove full of plays, poetry, words.”



**Ariwan Kai, 18**  
Raffles Institution (Junior College)

“Shakespeare’s most long-lived legacy is that of his many contributions to the English language.”



# BOUND TO THEATRE

LEONARD TAN talks to a young theatre group that lets passion lead the way

What goes on stage is only a small part of theatre – or the growth of arts group Bound Theatre.

“I felt like the owl from Hogwarts,” said Shalyn Yong, 23. Four years ago, Shalyn sent out Facebook messages to alumni of inwardBOUND asking them to be part of the inwardBOUND Youth Theatre Collective (IYTC), an idea that was sparked off by students who were passionate about theatre.

The founder of inwardBOUND, Ms Nora Crothers, recommended a few select individuals to Shalyn who took a leap of faith and reached out to about 10 complete strangers. No one back then knew what was about to blossom after that day, as eight other individuals came on board to be part of the IYTC. Starting out with a mission to create relevant, truthful and meaningful theatre and a vision to stage a show by July 2012, IYTC has come a long way to become Bound Theatre today.

With five shows under their belt – the most recent one at Goodman Arts Centre – the process of running a theatre collective has not been easy, especially with nine youths pursuing their education, career, and serving National Service, all at the same time.

IYTC started off with Shalyn being the producer and a former artistic director. Back then, the rest were considered as actors and collaborators, being the core team of the collective. While the ideas and scripts were the voice of IYTC as a whole, Shalyn handled logistical issues.

One major turning point for IYTC was their transition to Bound Theatre, now an independent theatre group.

After their first show Dear Mom in July 2012, they took one and a half years’ hiatus and only did their second show, Scroll, in March 2014. “Two of the founding members of IYTC had differing visions, both artistically and collaboratively,” said Shalyn. After Scroll, they had to re-evaluate what Bound meant to them because of the people leaving. On that note, Shalyn also left for London to pursue her Honours degree in Drama, Applied Theatre and Education at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

“Things have changed since then, we were only so young when IYTC was formed,” said Yan Shan. Most of them were students aged 17 or 18, just “fresh out of CCA”, with not much background in theatre. Most, if not all of them, “had lacked the

maturity” to run a collective. As such, they had to figure out the best direction for the group, as none of them were able to run the whole collective. Thus, they came out with an idea to run the collective from project to project, with each of them taking a different role each time. But they always made sure to go back to Bound’s vision and mission, as a team.

“We came in as collaborators with no leader, and everyone wanted to lead,” said Yan Shan. That was aggravated by the fact that Thomas took a one year hiatus from the team and they were left with no artistic director. “We had to struggle, learn, and figure ourselves out,” said Shalyn.

Looking back, it was during the most challenging times that they learnt the most. “We didn’t want an artistic director but yet wanted to create cohesively since we were a collective and through that we struggled, but I’m glad we did,” said Shalyn. “We’re still learning from each production that we create,” said Yan Shan. Looking back to the time during their third and fourth show +65 and Invasion, she realised that “one person could not wear too many hats” as that would only burn the person out and cause the team to lose focus.

***“We didn’t want an artistic director but yet wanted to create cohesively since we were a collective and through that we struggled, but I’m glad we did.”***

- Shalyn Yong

Having survived adversity, Bound Theatre is now on its way to becoming a platform for others to share their passion for theatre.

“For Invasion we had a 14-year-old boy audition with us,” said Yan Shan. “We’ve also worked with people from SOTA, LASALLE and NAFA,” she said. Looking forward to their sixth show happening in a few months

Photos courtesy of Bound Theatre



time, the writer, director and project manager of the show will not be from their core team – a first for Bound. In Bound, core members refer to the Board of Directors of the company, while project members are those who have worked with them for the different shows. Bound prides itself as a theatre collective with an ensemble that works with people not only within Bound.

“I felt immediately part of the family and everyone was kept in the open about the happenings of the production,” said Deborah Ooi, 19, a student who performed with Bound for To Begin Again. She jumped at the idea when she had the opportunity to audition for the show, and the process of putting the production has been fulfilling for her because of a wonderful team. She is thankful for the opportunity to work with “such a talented bunch” which allowed her to grow incredibly as an actress and an individual.

The shows that they have produced are also constantly improving. “I think our work has become more cohesive,” said Yan Shan. According to her, Dear Mum was produced from a very personal point of view “as kids needing to have a stage, perform and tell a story”, but now their work also incorporates views from society. They are also venturing into physical theatre and inviting theatre practitioners to their shows for professional critique.

The change is not only seen throughout the group but in individual members too.

“Can I just say she’s incredible,” said Shalyn as she remarked about how Yan Shan has grown throughout the years, revealing the camaraderie they share. According to Shalyn, Yan Shan is now very willing to look at her work and listen to critique, making her work better. “I can be very objective, and distance myself from the art form as much as I immerse myself in it,” said Yan Shan.

This year will be exciting for Bound as the group will embark on their sixth show in mid-August while going through a re-branding process.

You can find Bound Theatre at [facebook.com/boundtheatre](https://facebook.com/boundtheatre), and [@boundtheatre](https://twitter.com/boundtheatre) on Twitter and Instagram



# PLAYING WITH FIRE

Circus arts are no longer just for entertainment and laughs. TEO ZI LIN looks at how this art form is used to empower underprivileged children and youths

In an interview with The Guardian in March 2014, Mr Jay Che, the founder of Circus In Motion, said, "The beauty of circus arts is that it gives marginalised youths, who are more likely to have low confidence, an opportunity to perform. Circus allows them to hide behind the prop and perform without being judged."

Circus In Motion was set up with the notion of providing children and youths with the opportunities to express themselves using alternative means. Named as one of Singapore's youth enterprises of 2013, Circus In Motion is a contemporary circus arts organisation that offers social circus workshops, as well as alluring performances.

Besides having performed in a series of events such as the Esplanade's Flipside Festival 2012 and True Hearts ComChest 2011, Circus In Motion has also worked with more than 6,000 children and youths. Among them are the underprivileged, mentally challenged, youth offenders from residential homes, special needs schools, the Normal (Technical) stream in mainstream schools and even some underprivileged communities in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Cambodia.

Before Mr Che set up Circus In Motion in 2005, he worked with youths and had an opportunity to teach in East Spring Secondary School, where he made an impact, changing the lives of three students – Benjamin Teo, Edward Chua and Ethan Lee. Beneficiaries turned professional instructors and circus artistes, the three of them later on became Mr Che's right-hand men.

Benjamin, 24, is an expert in juggling. He goes by the name of Mr Numero due to his unusual interest in juggling things with numbers. In his secondary school days, Benjamin suffered from depression and struggled to manage his emotions. He was also involved in petty crimes. However, after being referred to the circus arts workshops by his teacher, things got better for Benjamin as he developed a passion for circus arts. Besides boosting Benjamin's self-esteem, circus arts "helped [him] a lot with [his] focus in studies, and also time management".

Edward, 24, is dubbed as the "Diabolic Diaboloist" who specialises in diabolo manipulation. Edward was a hard-core gaming

addict when he was 14. His gaming addiction was so severe, even his teachers gave up on him. Being exposed to circus arts helped to curb his gaming addiction as his interest in circus arts grew. Edward mentioned that his gaming background has helped him stay determined and not give up learning circus arts.

"In games, you keep grinding and grinding to improve your level. This is the same logic I applied to circus arts, where I kept on trying and trying, in order to improve," explains Edward.

When Ethan was 14, he was often teased, bullied and made fun of for the way he sounded. Having a voice that is of a higher pitch than the average male, many people mistook him for a female. Apart from dealing with the issues his voice caused, Ethan also had no goal in life and was constantly put down by teachers in front of his parents. His self-confidence was hit hard.

"However, circus arts gave me something to look forward to. Getting to perform allowed me to show people that I can do things without having to open my mouth, which gave me more confidence and an esteem boost," recalls Ethan, who is now a master of twirling and cigar box juggling at the age of 24.

After experiencing a defining change in their lives as a result of being exposed to circus arts, Benjamin, Edward and Ethan unanimously agree with Mr Che that circus training has the potential to motivate those who misbehave and reward those who show hard work and promise.

It has been a decade since the three of them took up circus arts and they have polished their skills to the standards of professional instructors and performers. Although they suffered many bruises and cuts amongst other injuries, the smiles of the youths and children keep them going – besides passion and one another's company.

"As an instructor, I know how much effort my students had put in for their performances. At the end of the day, the person who would be the most proud is himself or herself. When the kids had performed to the best of their abilities and receive applause or even standing ovations from the audience, the smiles on their faces really just make my day," says Ethan, grinning from ear to ear.

Benjamin adds, "When the kids do something that is out of our expectations, it is really very satisfying, especially when they pull off a good show." Edward also said that while it may be difficult at first to get through to children or youths who refuse to open up, after a while, "you can see their morale rising after they realise they can do amazing things".

"Circus skills can be used to teach life skills, including perseverance, teamwork, trust and positive risk-taking," said Mr Che in the same interview with The Guardian. These life skills help youths to gain confidence, forge relationships, and develop a good attitude.

"Circus is more than just colleagues or instructors or students. You are actually working and having fun with friends and family," says Benjamin.

***"The beauty of circus arts is that it gives marginalised youth, who are more likely to have low confidence, an opportunity to perform. It allows them to hide behind the prop and perform without being judged."***

*- Mr Jay Che  
Founder of Circus In Motion*



# Striking Poses at Soaring Heights

RACHEL YEO finds out if going to the extreme for that unique pose is the new way for aspiring models to shine



Janelle Wong

It's hazardous and an outrageous past time to some. But to others it is more than that.

Extreme urban exploration is defined as people examining man-made structures, notably abandoned ruins or rooftops.

This phenomenon has attracted worldwide attention because of daredevils like Russian photographer Vadim Mahorov, who scales dizzying heights to get jaw dropping picturesque views on the zenith of Russia's various peaks.

A city with buildings dotted everywhere, Singapore makes it relatively easy to find man-made structures to explore like car parks and rooftops. A number of abandoned places still exist in our widely developed nation, namely the Istana Woodneuk and Old Changi Hospital.

It's common for explorers to bring their cameras or smartphones to document their experiences for posterity. But it seems like this movement is not just attracting eager photographers – aspiring models are leveraging the art of extreme urban exploration to showcase their style as well.

"My first experience [of urban exploration] was at the rooftop of my condominium," says Eunice Tan Jie Lin, 17, a first-year Banking & Finance student at Kaplan Singapore.

She adds: "The roof top wasn't that high, only about 40 storeys!"

Describing her style as fierce and bold, acrophobia doesn't exist in Eunice's state of mind. Since she started freelancing modeling recently, Eunice has already worked with countless photographers to shoot her while urban exploring.

Janelle Allysa Wong, 19, a final-year Interior Design student in Singapore Polytechnic, is no stranger to modeling at towering and dilapidated places as well. She especially enjoys relaxing and working poses on rooftops.

"I don't really think of it as a rooftop and it feels good due to the satisfaction of being out in the open air," she explains. "It resembles how it's like to be at the peak of a mountain, and I love that kind of feeling."

Establishing their modelling styles through urban exploration seems to be paying off. A photo of Eunice boldly posing at the edge of a car park can fetch over 500 likes on Instagram, a feat for someone who is still relatively new to the modelling scene.

Janelle, who has amassed over 6,000 followers on Instagram in just over a year, has already extended her photos to other platforms like Tumblr. She also recently released a new website to showcase her portfolio and connect with her followers through personal blog posts.

Consistent exposure on social media also attracts a plethora of clothing brands and blog shops for these

*"I would urge them not to be too brave when standing around the edge. If they trip that's it, I can't do anything!"*

*- Khairulazmas*

models to promote their products online.

What started out as a hobby for exploring unconventional places has steadily evolved into a series of freelance modelling stints. Serious models now dedicate more of their time to come up with photoshoot concepts and collaborate with equally adventurous photographers.

However, there are inherent risks. One careless move can lead to severe injuries or death. People hanging out at abandoned places are exposed to unstable structures, flooring, or possibly the threat of being haunted by the supernatural.

Each time freelance photographer Khairulazmas, 31, photographs overzealous models gamely posing precariously at an unprotected edge, he cannot help but fear for their lives.

"I would urge them not to be too brave when standing around the edge," he chuckles. "If they trip that's it, I can't do anything!"

Khairulazmas recalls his creepiest experience while photographing another model at the forsaken Old Changi Hospital: "Even in broad daylight, I still got really bad goose bumps. I was really hoping not to see anything I shouldn't see when I was editing the photos."

A rise in youngsters trespassing on unauthorised property has also forced security to lock them. Some are lucky to escape with just a stern warning;

others may face fines of up to \$1,000, according to section 21 of the Public Order and Nuisance Act.

Despite knowing the hazards and increased security attention, some models remain fearless for multiple reasons.

"Singapore is really small and there aren't many places to go in the first place," says Ruby Zo Ra Yoon, 17, a freelance model and student at Canadian International School. "[This is why] youths usually go to these kinds of places to create outstanding pictures." Although Ruby never had an urban exploration experience, she is open to experiment in her future modelling endeavours.

But whether urban exploration will scale up or die down still remains to be seen.

"Singapore is getting stricter; when the trend was picking up, the security also picked up," explains Khairulazmas. He prefers to explore and connect with models overseas due to unfamiliarity with his surroundings as he is in a new country. But most importantly, places are rarely guarded by security.

"It'll probably last for a while more because different places offer unique views, not just in Singapore but overseas as well," reasons Janelle.

Trend or not, it is undeniable that urban exploration has given brave models that edge to their modeling careers.

Janelle Allysa Wong



Ruby Zo



Eunice Tan



PRINT TO SCREEN

# Bad Guys Save The World

CHIN YAN NI speaks up for the anti-hero team of super villains who take on extreme missions impossible, all for the sake of clemency



The comic book movie landscape is a crowded one, especially with the recent surge of the Marvel Avengers movies. Becoming homogenous in its offerings, the upcoming DC Comics movie Suicide Squad is set to stand out from this crowd.

“You know, all these movies are about defeating the evil alien robot from f\*\*\*ing Planet X, before it destroys the world with its ticking clock. I like to think of this [Suicide Squad] as the Comic Book Movie 2.0,” director David Ayer bluntly said about how this movie won’t just be another comic adaptation.

“You hear again and again that audiences want to see movies that are different, and critics say we make the same thing again and again in Hollywood. Then you go and make something different, and you get

kicked in the gut for it,” Ayer shares about the difficulty in making a film that’s different.

However, no difficulty is too great for him, and he plans to prove it with the upcoming Suicide Squad movie.

Based on the comic book series by John Ostrander, Suicide Squad represents Warner Brothers’ and DC Comics’ attempt to do something that hasn’t been done before - villains’ stepping up and into the spotlight. The film will showcase a large cast of characters, from the ruthless and controversial leader of the Suicide Squad, Amanda Waller (Viola Davis), to the insane and unpredictable crowd-favourite Joker (Jared Leto).

Breaking away from the typical superhero-saves-human-race storyline, Suicide Squad delves into the dark,

villainous side of the DC Extended Universe. It follows a group of super villains recruited by a secret government agency – also known as Task Force X in the comic series – to execute dangerous missions in exchange for clemency for their crimes.

“Let’s go save the world,” says Floyd Lawton (Will Smith), also known as Deadshot, a member of the anti-hero group. Deadshot has a reputation for being the greatest marksman in the world who, not surprising at all, works as a hired assassin as well.

What the Suicide Squad is going up against this time remains a mystery, but the movie will certainly be in a class of its own. Not only are the characters themselves different from other comic adaptations on the big screen, but so are their motivations and well-diversed backgrounds.

The film will star several big names such as I Am Legend’s Will Smith as Deadshot, Wolf of Wall Street’s Margot Robbie as Harley Quinn, and Jared Leto from the rock band Thirty Seconds To Mars as Joker, amongst others. Suicide Squad’s first trailer has already built up a healthy amount of steam way ahead of its release, but only time will tell if it truly lives up to Ayer’s words.

*Opens in Cinemas*  
**AUG 4**





# Superhero Comics Fly

Have comic books risen in popularity because of the hugely successful movie adaptations? CHARISSA JOY NG finds out

A stout, bespectacled boy walks into Marina Bay Sands. He looks up in awe at the sign that adorns the entrance, 'Singapore Toy, Game and Comic Convention'. With eyes gleaming and bursting with curiosity, he runs towards the information counter. "Where are the Doctor Strange comics?" he asks.

As superhero movies flood the celluloid scene, there is an ongoing debate whether comic books' big screen adaptations are the reason for the revival of interest in the print editions.

Comicbookmovie.com said that superhero comic books are recently "becoming more and more mainstream" to the public as a result of notable movies such as Superman Returns and X-Men: First Class. Also, not forgetting the film that created a breakthrough for the industry – the third highest grossing movie The Avengers, which earned US\$1.3 billion worldwide.

## Scene I: Heroes Wanted

A damsel is in distress, waiting for her hero to save her. As the fiend closes in for the finishing blow, unbeknownst to him, the silhouette of a cape crusader

36 PRINT TO SCREEN

descends on the pair. The villain looks up in fear. It's Superman.

A documentary titled Superheroes: A Never Ending Battle, said that inspiration for these characters first came from the Great Depression of the 1930s. Since then, more and more superheroes were created in the United States as it was a time when "the common man needed a champion because the forces allied against them were so powerful".

HYPE conducted a survey among 100 youths aged 18-25 to find out what they thought about these mega heroes. The poll revealed that 75.5 per cent watch the movies because they are attracted to the superhero.

Mr David Teh, 50, owner of Invasion Toys and Collectibles, says that it is a known fact that heroes will fight for the weak, and this appeals to people. "It's a form of escapism, with fantasy storytelling. A hero will overcome all odds," he says.

It is this classic storyline whether in reel or print that attracts people. Movie effects that we do not get in

*"It's a form of escapism, with fantasy storytelling. A hero will overcome all odds."*

- Mr David Teh

the comic book version add to that excitement.

Of the youths who took part in the survey, 78.9 per cent agreed that the movies ignited their interest in the print edition.

As more and more of these comic book stories are brought to the big screen, interest in them appears to have been revved up.

Mr Bill Teoh, 81, owner of Comics World, a comic books store, thinks otherwise. "The good movies based on comics have helped people to get interested in them, but not to a large extent," he remarks.

Comic Book Words by 1001freedownloads.com

# WOW!

## Scene II: Superheroes Endure

At the sight of Superman, the brute retreats and stumbles. He drops to his knees and with pleading eyes, he begs for mercy. Soon after, the repeated offender is cuffed and escorted away under tight security. The hero then flies off with the lady in his arms.

With the advent of technology in the past two decades, new hobbies have sprung up - gaming, blogging, posting videos on YouTube and more. While young people may have moved away from the comics in print, faithful comic book fans from the 1980s or those who were captivated by the movies thirst for more.

Marcus Lee, 19, a Business Studies student at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, says

his love for these characters can be seen from his pursuit of these powerful vigilantes. Marcus has been reading the comic series of the superhero Flash since his childhood. He believes that they are the better ones as they "explore more concepts and tone".

It appears that the screen versions did revive the interest in the books to a certain degree. Comic store owners see new faces, but not many are regular buyers.

Mr Teoh, who still is a comic book fanatic in his ripe old age, contends that the movies have indeed given the comics a new lease of life. Moreover, the movies are getting "more accurate with the comics."

Robert Frost, editor of UcreateComics said that many store managers believe that non-regular comic readers can be attracted by single books that are related to the movie or television series, but are "intimidated by the sheer magnitude of superhero comics

and their non-relationship to their cinematic or televised versions".

## Scene III: Celluloid Superheroes Reign Supreme

The duo arrives in a safe quiet place, away from the crowd in the buzzing night life of Metropolis. The masculine hero has captivated the heart of the young Lois Lane with his rescue. The two gaze into each other's eyes as a story only they know starts to unfold from this moment on.

Geek fans of these superheroes may notice that the movies don't usually follow the print version closely in order to fit the storyline into three hours. Avid fans are displeased while moviegoers seem to be fine with it.

In the survey, 77.3 per cent prefer the movie adaptations to the original print version. Nevertheless, both the paperbacks and films are getting people thrilled, stimulating their imagination to think out of the reality, escaping the mundane life.

## Looking Back... And Ahead

1. Did you know that Superman was portrayed as a villain at first? His creator, Jerry Siegel, first self-published a story titled "The Reign of the Superman", in which he is mad scientist who has telepathic abilities after plucking a vagrant from a breadline. His friend, Joe Shuster came onboard soon after and revamped the character into a hero that had an alien background.

2. Did you know that there are seven comic-to-movie adaptations slated to come out this year?

- Deadpool – 12 Feb
- Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice – 25 Mar
- Captain America: Civil War – 6 May
- X-Men: Apocalypse – 27 May
- Suicide Squad – 5 Aug (See Print To Screen page 36 – 37)
- Gambit – 7 Oct
- Doctor Strange – 4 Nov



PRINT TO SCREEN 37

Comic Background designed by freepik



# ctv

## PRODUCTIONS



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## Pride and Prejudice – and a Zombie Apocalypse

SARAH RACHEL TEO enters Jane Austen's world of 19th Century England... with a gruesome twist

We all know how it goes: guy saves girl, guy gets girl and they live happily ever after. A typical story of romance, love and passion.

But this time, Elizabeth Bennet of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is fiercer, stronger and scarier than ever before. Armed with knives and guns, the five Bennet sisters not only have the books and looks, they also have the fight and might to ward off zombies in the background of the Regency era.

The movie adaptation from a modern spoof of the classic novel, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, follows closely the original plot closely but with an addition of the "undead", otherwise known as zombies.

The author of the spoof, Seth Grahame-Smith, who is also the screenwriter of *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (2012), told *Entertainment Weekly* that the original novel was "perfect groundwork for an ultraviolent, bone-crushing, zombie massacre to take place". Grahame-Smith had arguably started the whole trend of the mashup genre with this 2009 novel of horror, romance and comedy.

In their corsets and fancy dresses, Lizzy (Lily James) and her sisters attend balls and parties in search of a man to marry. Initial prejudices between her and Mr Darcy (Sam Riley) remain, but the two end up fighting together in a zombie battle as their romance blossoms.

It looks like an awesome girl-power movie with everything the original Lizzy embodies, but more. Smart, talented

and boldly independent, her character is further enhanced and trained to be a kungfu-kicking zombie warrior.

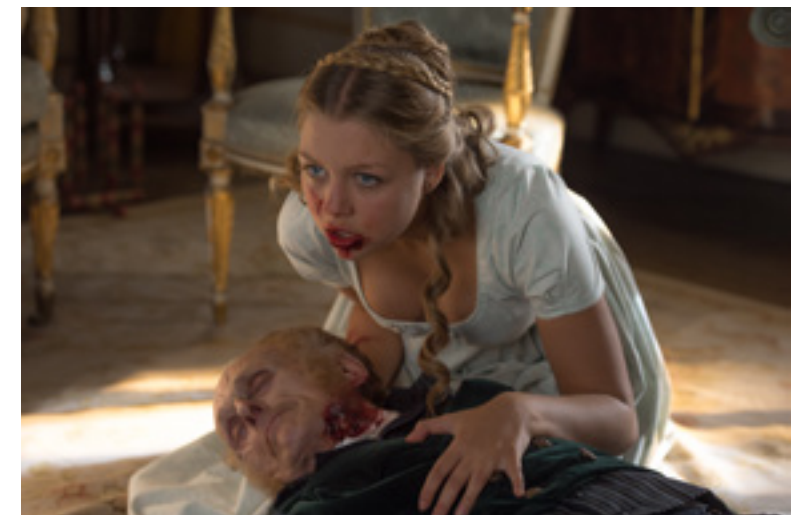
James, who previously played Cinderella in the March 2015 movie of the same title, said *ninja Lizzy* is "fierce" during a panel interview at the San Diego Comic-Con 2015. "In fact being us five girls, the Bennet sisters, fighting together and destroying together was really, really fun," she added.

The sisters are seen training for battle, slashing throats at a ball and round the dining table where suitors seek a wife among them, Mr Bennet says that his daughters are "trained for battle, not the kitchen" in the official trailer released in October 2015. For to live with the undead, women "must have the thorough knowledge of singing,

dancing and the art of war".

Under the direction of Burr Steers of *Igby Goes Down*, and a cast with Matt Smith, Douglas Booth, Jack Huston and Bella Heathcote, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is surely something for those seeking, quite literally, a bloody romance.

*Opens in Cinemas*  
**Feb 11**



Photos courtesy of Cathay-Keris Films Pte Ltd

PRINT TO SCREEN 39





# Pledge Your Allegiance

Escape with TEO ZI LIN through the latest adaptation of the blockbuster Divergent series franchise

“I belong to the people I love, and they belong to me – they, and the love and loyalty I give them, form my identity far more than any word or group ever could.”

One of the most anticipated films of 2016, The Divergent Series: Allegiant portrays the epitome of allegiance through breaking the boundaries of one's own world. Based on author Veronica Roth's New York Times bestseller, the film is directed by Robert Schwentke from a screenplay by Noah Oppenheim, Adam Cooper, Bill Collage and Stephen Chbosky.

The third instalment stars The Descendants' Golden Globe® nominee for Best Supporting Actress Shailene Woodley (Tris), Golden Boy's Theo James (Four), The Help's Academy Award® for Best Supporting Actress winner Octavia Spencer (Johanna), and 21 Grams' Academy Award® nominee for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role Naomi Watts (Evelyn). Golden Globe® nominee for Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture - Comedy/Musical Jeff Daniels (David) from The Purple Rose of Cairo also joins the cast. With such a star-studded and award-winning cast, we can count on the actors and actresses to bring the best of the characters' bills and emotions.

After discovering earth-shattering secrets in Insurgent, Tris, together with partner Four, must escape beyond the walls of Chicago, even if it means leaving their loved ones behind. For the first time in their lives, they will break the boundaries of the only city they know, where they have lived all their life. However, venturing into the new and unknown means those revelations that Tris and Four painstakingly unravelled are quickly rendered meaningless. Shocking new truths come to light.



As a ruthless battle ignites in the new world beyond Chicago and threatens all of humanity, Tris and Four must overcome mind games and inner conflicts to quickly decide who to trust, and who not to. For the sake of survival, Tris will be cornered, yet again, to make unprecedented choices about courage, allegiance, sacrifice, and love.

To fans of Tris, the thought of watching the ending of the Divergent series where David shoots Tris to death on screen, must be a dreaded moment. To show their sincerity in wanting Tris to live, fans started an online petition on change.org to bring about a change to Allegiant's ending.

Good news? The successful novelist Roth might be changing her mind despite maintaining initially that the ending will not be changed.

Bad news? We have to wait for a year to find out as The Divergent Series: Ascendant is slated for release on 24 March, 2017. Well played, Roth, at feeding, but not really satisfying, our curiosity.



Opens in Cinemas  
**Mar 18**

Photos courtesy of Golden Village Pictures Pte Ltd



# THE RETURN OF THE MONKEY KING

Superpowers will be needed as LEONARD TAN takes you on an arduous journey with The Monkey King

The classic Chinese novel Journey to the West is a household name – with many of us fondly remembering the fun-loving, cheeky, golden-haired Monkey King. Of course, journeying to the west would not be complete without Monkey King's two fellow disciples – the dimwit, lazy and plump Zhu Ba Jie and the reformed sand demon, Sha Wu Jing – and their pure but helpless master, the monk Xuan Zang.

The Monkey King 2, a film adaptation of the classic novel, will see the quartet embarking on an arduous journey during which they do battle with the seductive and shrewd enchantress, Bai Gu Jing, or White Bone Demon.

A sequel to the The Monkey King released in 2014, where they battled the Jade Emperor of Heaven, this second instalment of a seven-title franchise. It will yet again be helmed by Hong Kong director Cheang Pou-Soi.

Even if you have not read the novel, one reason to watch the movie is

surely the star-studded cast. Hong Kong veteran singer-actor Aaron Kwok plays Monkey King and this is his first collaboration with Chinese mainland star, Gong Li, who plays White Bone Demon. It will also be interesting to see what Sammo Hung, the movie's action and martial arts choreographer, has in store specially for her.

The dazzling cast also includes Feng Shaofeng (Tang Xuan Zang), who recently starred in the Sino-French coproduction Wolf Totem. Comedian and actor Xiao Shen Yang (Zhu Ba Jie), who shot to fame at the 2009 Spring Festival Gala, and veteran Chinese American singer-actor Kris Philips (The King of Western Heaven) – better known as Fei Xiang, add to the star quotient.

Liu Xiaoguang, Executive Producer of the film, says: “The new cast is amazing, and the sequel will be the champion of the 2016 Spring Festival season and set new records at box offices.”

Liu adds: “We'll have a big number of scenarios featuring the special effects,

*“The Monkey King 2 will see the quartet embarking on an arduous journey to battle a seductive, shrewd enchantress, Bai Gu Jing.”*

which may reach the highest level for Chinese-language movies. All the computer-generated roles, such as the dragon horse and the colossal tiger, will grab the appetites of both children and elderly audiences.”

Opens in Cinemas  
**FEB 4**

PRINT TO SCREEN 41

Photos courtesy of Shaw Organisation



# FEATURES

## Romancing The Outdoors

Think out of the chocolate box this Valentine's Day. LEONARD TAN, MEGAN TAN and TAY YU YAN propose some not-so-conventional date ideas

Time flies. It felt like yesterday when you and I went on a date. Nothing extravagant, no frills, it was just you and me spending the last day of 2015 together. Perhaps it's a countdown date tradition. You know? Watching sparks and sprinkles of celebratory colours light up a canvas of bluish black with your significant other. Then came January, when you were busy settling in for the year, and in a blink of an eye, it's February, and everyone knows love is in the air.

When it's the big V Day, forget the candle-lit dinners. We've put together the ultimate dating guide for all you frantic squirrels out there. Where to go, what to buy, and how to keep you and your date occupied.

Photo by picjumbo.com

### For the Active Adventurers

You're a fun-loving duo who would rather do without the tired ritual of roses and swanky meals, so here's an idea for a leisurely V Day afternoon.

Start off slow with a laidback cycling experience from Changi Village to East Coast Park. Just a disclaimer – it's going to be a 35km bicycle ride to and fro. So gentlemen, trust us when we say: "Don't pick the couple bike". Nonetheless, what may seem like a long and arduous journey might just create meaningful conversations and unexpected opportunities between the both of you.

And if the both of you are still kicking it, go try a hand at cable-skiing! Whether you just want to cruise around the lagoon on a kneeboard or catch the big air on a wakeboard, it only takes a few bicycle paddles down to SKI360degree for a thrilling splash of fun together.

Well surely, don't expect the day to end just right there. Catch a scenic breather once you've arrived at East Coast Park. There you'll find restaurants and eateries to satisfy any food cravings. As the sun sets, there is even a hint of romance in the air.



Black Forest two watch bundle By Forrest, available on megafash.com for \$215.30.

Gym Club Bag available at all New Balance outlets for \$79.

### Locate Us!

#### SKI360degree

**Where:** SKI360degree, 1206A East Coast Parkway Singapore 449891

**Telephone:** 6442 7318

#### Opening Hours:

Mon, Tues & Thurs: 10am to 7pm  
Wed & Fri: Noon to 9pm  
Sat & Sun: 9am to 10pm



Straw Sun Hat by Embellish, available on zalora.sg for \$22.90.

Casper Sunglasses available on thegeneralstore.com for \$49.

### Locate Us!

#### Smith Marine Kelong Seafood

**Where:** Pulau Ubin Coastal Area  
Pick-up at Changi Point Ferry Terminal, by reservation only.

Reservations must be made three days in advance.

#### Opening Hours:

Daily from 10am to 7pm

**Telephone:** 9792 7609

### For the Calm & Collected

If staying at home and playing board games, or just binge-watching Netflix all day interests you both, then surely you're a chill couple who would love island chilling or sun tanning at the different beaches. Try travelling away from this island to a rustic and cozy kelong off the shores of Singapore. It isn't Pulau Ubin or St John's Island, but you both could go to Smith Marine Kelong Seafood restaurant for a date.

Apart from dining at the restaurant that serves fresh seafood, you could catch your own fish from the sea and request for it to be cooked by the chefs for your meal. You will be able to sit at the kelong in your hammock and enjoy the strong sea breeze which will mask the afternoon heat.

Games, such as pool, are also available for your enjoyment. As the kelong faces Pulau Ubin and the Straits of Johor, immersing yourself in nature will take your mind to places as you enjoy the view with your beloved.

As the kelong opens at 10am and closes at 7pm, you are encouraged to go there in the morning to rejuvenate and chill at this "hipster" place. Embark on this maritime adventure where you don't have to bring your passport, yet chill by the sea and watch the sun set over the horizon.

Watercolour heart with leaves designed by Freepik  
Photos courtesy of thegeneralstore.com, zalora.sg, and megafash.com



## For the Urban Owls

It's the weekend, but you sleep in and only wake up in the late afternoon when your day truly begins. In the evening, you meet your friends in town to dine and chill out at a bar, and maybe even catch a midnight movie. Sounds like you? If you are a city person who likes the buzzing nightlife, you should definitely consider going to The Screening Room for your Valentine's Day date! It's a two-in-one hang-out with a rooftop bar and a movie screening room which plays movies with themes ranging from Christmas to horror every month.

Enjoy dinner on the rooftop where you can have an overview of the beautiful Chinatown landscape. Clink your glasses and have a celebratory drink or two to swing into the romantic mood. While sitting under the pale moonlight, reminisce the wonderful memories the two of you share, and laugh over the embarrassing ones. When you're done or feel that you want to have a change of setting, you could head down to the screening room on level three to watch a late night movie.

Do reserve seats in advance, because that will not only ensure you a place on that special day, but also make you look more chic as a city person. You'd have to check their Facebook page at [facebook.com/screeningroom.sg](https://facebook.com/screeningroom.sg) for updates on the movie schedule for the month to book in advance.



Orbitkey available at [thegeneralstore.com](https://thegeneralstore.com) for \$49.90.

Stila Stay All Day Liquid Lipstick available at all Sephora outlets for \$35.

## Locate Us!

### The Screening Room

**Where:** 12 Ann Siang Road  
Singapore 069692

Level 3 - Screening room  
Level 4 - Rooftop bar

**Opening Hours:**  
Daily from 6pm to 12am

**Telephone:** 6535 3357

**Email:** [info@screeningroom.com.sg](mailto:info@screeningroom.com.sg)

## Unforgettable Gifts

"I remember once some guy gave me bed sheets as a gift. And they were with cartoon prints!"

– Maegan Su, 20, student

"The weirdest thing I got was a Razor keyboard with the keys 'L', 'O', 'V', and 'E' covered with heart stickers."

– Lim Zhi Cong, 24, freelance photographer

"Someone gave me a broken phone with cracks on the screen in the shape of a heart. I don't even know how he did that."

– Peh Yi Yan, 19, operations manager

"I once received a torchlight, and my date told me it was because I light up his life."

– Hanis Shahilla, 20, student

"Mahjong table! It was the sweetest thing because she knew I like playing mahjong and hand carried it all the way to my house."

– Dylan Wong, 22, National Service

"It was so traumatic – this guy who was chasing me gave me candles that were all in white."

– Sim Hui Wen, 28, teacher

Photo courtesy of [thegeneralstore.com](https://thegeneralstore.com)  
Speech bubbles designed by Freepik

# The Romance Reality Check

MEGAN TAN unravels three common romantic ideals that might just become the next relationship deal-breaker

It was a lazy Sunday afternoon. I was hearing hearty chatter down from my home and so I took a quick look from the windows. There was a couple, both beaming from ear to ear, walking a handsome Siberian husky down the street. "Relationship goals," I whispered.

We've all seen it on social media. The hashtag, #relationshipgoals, is often accompanied with visuals that spark fluttery emotions and make us go, "Awww, how sweet." Then again, sometimes we question the scenes behind these glamorous couple portrayals. Are we setting the romantic bar too high these days? Here are three common romantic expectations that can, surprisingly, be seen as unrealistic.

## ✓ Communicate

It is a sweet gesture when your partner knows what you want without uttering a word. But we've got to admit – things don't exactly work that way all the time.

"Asking questions are free anyway," Ron Wong, 19, student in a three-year relationship, avidly exclaimed as he urged the importance of seeking clarifications from each other.

## ✓ The 5 Love Languages

Every one is wired differently and likewise, the way we all feel loved varies too. Just because she feels most adored when you shower her with gifts, doesn't mean he would appreciate the same gesture as much.

Take the Love Language test ([5lovelanguages.com](https://5lovelanguages.com)) to better understand each other's inclination towards the different expressions of love.

## 1 We should understand each other's thoughts and feelings

You could be setting up a relationship pitfall for yourself on this. Being in love may not equate to knowing each other inside out. People don't quote humans as fickle beings for nothing. Seriously, sometimes we don't understand enough about ourselves either. Remember when you once swore by the best chocolate lava cake ever but now find yourself lacking a sweet tooth? Or that one time you promised to never fall in love with anyone else apart from your ex-beau?

Just as we're all on an individual journey of discovering who we are, it requires a continuous attempt to know your significant other, too.

Ms Sharon Lim, 26, a relationship counsellor, shared that part of building a healthy relationship is about "recognising an on-going process of learning something new about each other".

## 2 There should be no secrets between us

One hundred per cent disclosure. Ideal? Definitely. Is it realistic? Not necessarily. Don't get me wrong – the pair should embrace a safe environment for each other to be open and vulnerable. Honesty is indeed important between couples, or as a matter of fact, any non-fleeting relationships. But too many of us mistake honesty for full disclosure of our lives.

Being caught in a romantic relationship does not eliminate both of you as two separate individual beings. Both of you are equally entitled to your own personal space and boundaries. Go ahead and let be, if there are times when you'd like to spend some alone time or moments when your partner needs to organise his/her own thoughts. Rather than focusing on what is being withheld from each other, trust should become the common denominator between you and your partner.

## 3 We should be willing to change ourselves for each other

At some point in time, we've made efforts to become better versions of ourselves for our significant other. But you know how the idiom goes about the leopard's inability to change its spots? Along the way, we realise old habits die hard, we slip back to square one and things tend to become rough and patchy again.

"Change, at the end of the day, should come from an intrinsic motivation," Ms Lim said. Undeniably, our partners sometimes do help us become better individuals. But the only reason for that should come from their confidence to speak truth and point out character flaws that we don't see in our own lives. Beyond the mere motivation to please our partners, we all need to understand the reason and worth behind changing ourselves. That's when change truly becomes permanent and valuable. Not momentary. Nothing short-lived.

Photo courtesy of Megan Tan





## Rising Support For Singapore Designers

There seems to be greater awareness of designers and artists in Singapore, as TAN HUI RONG discovers

Singapore is generally divided into two camps when it comes to art. The first camp believes that Singapore lacks the cultural infrastructure for the arts to thrive, while the second camp feels that Singapore possesses tremendous potential.

A strong believer of the latter, Ho Si Hui, 20, a final-year Mass Communication student at Ngee Ann Polytechnic and an aspiring designer, said, "When I attended the Local People x Noise Singapore event, I got exposed to a lot of different artists. Singapore has a lot of talented artists, from UltraaViolet to Erikaroon and Sarah Thursday, and there is (still) a lot of room to grow."

Indeed, the Singapore Cultural Statistics 2014 indicated that the arts scene in Singapore has seen steady growth. Singapore has not only seen a rise in support for local designs among consumers but also support among business owners. For example, outlets such as Naiise were created to support local designers, while HipVan, an online store, supports independent artists.

Art events such as Singapore Art Week, Aliwal Urban Art Festival and Singapore Night Festival, as well as art markets hosted by MAAD, Public Garden, The Affordable Art Fair and

the Local People draw thousands of interested buyers each time, providing much needed encouragement, coverage and support for the local art community.

Si Hui, motivated by the success she has seen at these art markets, took her chances and tried to sell her hand-drawn products at one such event just last year. "I was really surprised that a few customers were already flocking over to my booth even though it wasn't fully set up yet! At the end of the day, I even managed to make a profit even though the products were sold at such a low profit margin." Si Hui is now looking towards launching her designs officially.

However, it is worth noting that just five years ago, local singer Inch Chua left an emotional letter highlighting the lack of support for the local art community among Singaporeans as the reason she decided to leave the little red dot to pursue her music career.

So why did Singaporeans decide to support local works five years later? Shirley Wong, designer of Ang Ku Kueh Girl and Friends, said: "I believe this growing acceptance among Singaporeans is partly due to a growing sophistication of the local market, an increased awareness of local designs helped by local media. And local

designers are coming up with new and more interesting designs making the art community even stronger."

Surprisingly, the popularity of local designs is not restricted to the local scene. In fact, WeChat, a popular mobile messaging service in China, recently commissioned Ang Ku Kueh Girl and Friends to design a set of 16 animated stickers, giving Ang Ku Kueh Girl and Friends regional recognition and exposure in Malaysia, the Philippines and Myanmar.

Other notable local successes include Band of Doodlers being commissioned to draw for Google; Tell Your Children who is having a two-month tour in Vancouver, Canada, and the United States of America; as well as The Sam Willows being signed on to Warner Music.

*"I believe this growing acceptance among Singaporeans is partly due to a growing sophistication of the local market."*

- Shirley Wong

Photos courtesy of Ho Si Hui

# HYPE42 GIVEAWAY

Say cheese!

To thank you for your loyal support, **HYPE** is giving away **3 goodie bags** containing a Taylor Swift t-shirt, THE WEEKND t-shirt, Justin Bieber's album and The Weeknd's album. How sweet is that?

Here's how you can win one!

- 1) Follow **HYPE** (@HYPEsg) and **Universal Music Singapore** (@universalmusg) on Instagram
- 2) Take a selfie with this giveaway page and upload it on your Instagram (remember to unprivate your account!)
- 3) Hashtag #UniversalMusicxHYPE

It's that simple!

Contest will end on 1 March 2016.  
Winners will be contacted through their Instagram accounts.



## BEAUTY BEHIND THE MADNESS

2015 has already been a breakout year for THE WEEKND with three tracks currently in the Top 25 of the Billboard Hot 100. The album's first official single "Can't Feel My Face" currently sits at #6 while previously released tracks "Earned It (Fifty Shades of Grey)" and "The Hills" sit at #16 and #23, respectively. "Can't Feel My Face" continues to remain a fixture in the Top 5 of iTunes Overall Top Songs Chart and it has hit #1 on the iTunes R&B/Soul chart as well as #1 on Shazam USA and Spotify USA chart. "Can't Feel My Face" is also seeing huge global success with the track debuting Top 5 in over 33 markets including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark and Poland. Written by THE WEEKND and co-produced by pop powerhouse Max

Martin, it's no surprise that the track is already being hailed as the best song of 2015 by outlets like USA Today and Radio.com.

2015 started out with a bang with "Earned It (Fifty Shades of Grey)", THE WEEKND's contribution and first release from the chart-dominating Fifty Shades of Grey Original Motion Picture Soundtrack. The single achieved triple platinum status as certified by the RIAA and has spent 27 weeks on the Billboard Hot 100.

A festival showstopper, THE WEEKND headlined last year's Lollapalooza music festival joining the likes of Paul McCartney, Metallica and Florence + the Machine. He capped off a closing set at Coachella 2015 to rave reviews.



Photos courtesy Universal Music Singapore  
Pattern is a derivative of "Dark Sharp Edges" by Carlos Aguilar  
from Subtle Patterns, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0



# Passing the 10-year (Book)Mark

Over the past five years, book lovers have been left broken-hearted by the spate of chain bookstore closures in Singapore.

In 2011, Borders shut down its bookstore at Wheelock Place. Homegrown book retailer Page One soon followed suit, with Popular Holdings-owned Prologue bookstore shutting down its flagship outlet at Ion Orchard too.

Reasons for these closures included high rent and low profits, along with the claim of a weakening book culture in Singapore.

“More people are spending their time online. You can also find e-books on the Internet, and download as many as you want within a short period of time. That is why books aren’t selling as fast anymore,” says Mr Jawahar Ali, 50, owner of the Book Point bookstore at Bras Basah Complex.

However, Mr Kenny Leck, 37, co-founder and owner of BooksActually, a bookstore in Tiong Bahru, disagrees.

“When bookstores don’t do well and close down, it’s not because there is no demand. The bookstore trade is like any other trade. If the merchandise that you put out is not attractive enough to convince consumers to step into your store and part with their money, then you are

definitely not going to do well,” he says.

Apart from their differing views, both owners clearly know what they are doing, having managed to keep their bookstores running over the years.

Dubbed as one of Singapore’s leading independent book retailers, BooksActually has been home to a wide range of obscure books and local works for more than 10 years, while managing a full-fledged publishing house and its own handmade stationery brand in recent years.

However, things haven’t always been so smooth sailing for Mr Leck, who had to move four times since business started in 2005. Starting out at book fairs to save enough funds before moving to a physical bookstore, BooksActually has seen its shift from Telok Ayer, to Ann Siang Street, then Club Street, before finally residing in Tiong Bahru for more than four years.

“As an independent bookstore, we had the worst in terms of rentals or overheads. We don’t have the support of big companies, or access to big banking loans such as a chain bookstore would have,” says Mr Leck.

BooksActually thrives on book-inspired events to keep loyal customers - using the space as a literary venue for local writers, selling antique items, and promoting local works through its

**RIZQINA MAHDZAR** finds out how two different bookstores – one an independent outlet, the other a long-running family business – have managed to keep up over the years

publishing house. “Math Paper Press is part and parcel of the bookstore. They can’t do without each other,” he says, having printed over 140 titles.

Book Point, on the other hand, is a family-owned business that has been running for more than 50 years. Mr Ali took over the trade from his father 15 years ago. With three different outlets in the same complex displaying over 250,000 to 300,000 books, customers can find a myriad of titles from their huge collection of fiction and non-fiction works. On the first floor, Jat Mart, a mini mart owned by Mr Ali, sells books as well. He plans to convert this into a full-fledged bookstore.

## Bookstore Locations

**BooksActually**  
9 Yong Siak St  
Singapore 168645

**Opening Hours**  
Monday - Sunday: 11am - 9pm

**Book Point**  
Bras Basah Complex  
231 Bain St  
#02-69, #03-17, #03-19  
\***Jat Mart:** 01-19  
Singapore 180231

**Opening Hours**  
Monday - Thursday: 10am - 7pm  
Friday: 2.30pm - 7pm  
Sunday: 10.30am - 6pm

Photos courtesy of Rizqina Mahdzar



“We deal mostly with second-hand books. This is a bookstore where you can find all in one place – from children’s books, educational books and encyclopedias to complete sets of fictional works,” he says.

“I have most of the subjects covered. Even if I don’t, I can source it for you,” Mr Ali says this with confidence, mentioning the three million books that he has accumulated over the years, of which more than 2.5 million are currently stocked in a warehouse of more than 20,000 square feet.

Mr Ali’s niche lies in his collection of rare, out-of-print books, which he says can be dated up to 100 years old. He constantly buys and collects books from people, equipping him with a wide range of obscure titles.

“You can find all the best-selling books from any other regular bookstore. But it’s very rare that you would come across a bookstore that sells books like mine,” he says. This specialty has allowed him to continue running the family business all these years.

Mr Ali plans to put his three million titles online in the future, allowing people to filter through the books and buy them. BooksActually, on the other hand, had already taken to the Internet when social networking sites started dominating the internet sphere.

Mr Leck believes that he is fairly active on social media, with BooksActually’s Facebook page having more than 34,000 likes. He emphasises the importance of social media, quoting a book signing that he hosted for poet Lang Leav, famous for her international best-selling book *Love and Misadventure*.

**“More people are spending their time online. You can also find e-books on the Internet, and download as many as you want within a short period of time. That is why books aren’t selling as fast anymore.”**

*- Jawahar Ali, owner of Book Point*

“She was the only author that I’ve hosted where I had to keep the glass door open, because the line went all the way out,” he says, “She is that famous because she promoted her works on social media site Tumblr and reached out to the younger generation there.”

As for the future of BooksActually, Mr Leck says that the next 10 years will see no rest for him. Along with his co-workers, he works seven days a week, with the bookstore only closing during Christmas.

“Our arts scene only started gaining awareness from the ’80s onwards, meaning that it is still relatively young. If we were to start relaxing now, we will not be able to grow. We have the opportunity to do as much work now, so that in 50 years time, there will be more Singaporean authors who can write for a living,” says Mr Leck.





**HEERAJ WEARS**  
JACKET: PRAS THE BANDIT, \$129  
SHIRT: PRAS THE BANDIT, \$45  
PANTS: THE AUTHORITY, \$39  
GLASSES: SANDER BROWN GRADATION  
FRAMES, VISUAL MASS, \$95

**MADIHAH WEARS**  
JACKET: PRAS THE BANDIT,  
PERSONAL COLLECTION  
TOP: PINSTRIP LONG SLEEVED TEE,  
THE AUTHORITY, \$39  
JEANS: MODEL'S OWN  
SHOES: STYLIST'S OWN  
EARRINGS: TESSELLATE CO, \$27.90  
SUNGLASSES: TIANNA CANDIUM  
FRAMES, VISUAL MASS, \$95

## Livin' la Vida Local

CLARA TAN, ELIZABETH GOH and GORDON NG shine the spotlight on six brands and designers fearlessly breaking down walls and pushing the parameters on Singapore's fashion industry

It's always easy to hit 'add to cart' or make a purchase from a boutique without knowing what goes on behind the scenes. For many local designers, the sweat and grit from endless days of sketching translate to a fine piece of sartorial product they're proud to call their own. Whether it's a pair of glasses, a bag, or just a simple t-shirt, every piece of work has a story to tell. Here, we feature six talented homegrown designers who, albeit from very different backgrounds, share one thing in common – the passion for creating.

One way you know you have a good idea is if people pay you for it before you have product to sell. That's exactly what happened to Quanda Ong, 28, when he raised \$50,000 in three weeks – the largest fashion campaign in Asia – to start Gnome and Bow. Coming from a banking and finance background, Quanda's curiosity and passion for creating a "bag with an extra spark" led him away and into the world of fashion accessories.

The brand is built on the core idea of stories, and Quanda's makes a good one. "I used to design using Powerpoint, which was quite ridiculous! I had to learn how to make the design process easier, better, and more complete so the

designs would come out more precise."

Add being new and being a local brand and you've got an uphill battle for differentiation. "We can't compete with heritage brands like Hermes or Louis Vuitton," admits Quanda.

So what sets Gnome and Bow apart? "We use stories to inspire our products. Everyone likes listening to and telling stories, so we connect with the consumer through that. And no one else in the market is doing it like we are. I get asked what's unique about us a lot, so I answer with a lot of conviction when I say this. Otherwise, I wouldn't be doing this at all!"



**HEERAJ WEARS**  
JACKET: CONTRAST SLEEVE BOMBER,  
THE AUTHORITY, \$89  
INNER JACKET: PRAS THE BANDIT, \$129  
JEANS: MODEL'S OWN  
GLASSES: BRODY DEMI FRAMES,  
VISUAL MASS, \$95  
BAG: KENSINGTON MESSENGER  
BAG, GNOME & BOW, \$375  
SHOES: MODEL'S OWN



MADIHAH WEARS  
JACKET: PRAS THE BANDIT,  
PERSONAL COLLECTION  
EARRINGS: TESSELLATE.CO, \$27.90

# Pras the Bandit

Scroll through Instagram's explore page and you're likely to come across many online shops parading streetwear from Stussy and Supreme. Though the sudden spike in popularity for street fashion might be a passing trend to some, for Ivan Timothy Prasetya, 27, it's a way of life.

Pras the Bandit is Ivan's brainchild. Launched in 2011, his label offers a range of men's street style, from jackets to t-shirts. Designing streetwear started as a hobby for Ivan, where he would make shirts for his friends and family. But as word spread about his designs, the demand grew and he opened his online shop.

What sets Pras the Bandit apart from other local streetwear brands popping up is that Ivan chooses not to follow the streetwear trends in Singapore. His endgame with this label is not about the amount of sales made, but rather about fulfilling his love for both design and streetwear. To do that, he seeks inspiration from original streetwear brands from America and

Japan, and releases only a select number of pieces that he is proud to call his own.

"Supreme initially started as a group of skateboarders so even until now, their philosophy is skate. Until now, no matter what kind of products they release, they're still making things that skateboarders can use, and are still staying true to their roots. My roots are quality over quantity," he says.

As Ivan still works as a designer for the corporate end of NTUC, he only has time to create new designs when he returns home. With his kitchen as his studio, he uses Photoshop and Illustrator to create fresh and quirky urban styles.

He jokes: "After going back home I have to juggle [commitments] until my eyes become dry. But this is what I like doing so it's okay. Even though my eyes are dry, I'll just use an eyedropper and continue."

This drive and passion for doing streetwear is what allows Ivan to push through even the most exhausting days.



# Josiah Chua

Take a peek at Josiah Chua's body of work and immediately three words surface – loud, rebellious, unconventional. Easily likened to Singapore's version of Jeremy Scott, the LASALLE College of the Arts graduate creates pieces for those who are unafraid of experimenting with fashion.

For one, he has a mass following in Japan, having created a niche market there for himself and being stocked in cities like Shinjuku. The turning point came when pop singer Lady Gaga handpicked and bought his Egyptian Pharaoh Jacket in 2014 while on tour in Japan.

Today, the 27-year-old hopes to break into the local market slowly. "In Singapore, I think it's a bit more conservative... I hope Singaporeans will be more accepting of trends. The people here like basics a lot but I think sometimes you can pick really nice basics but still not look sloppy," he shares.

Though it may take some time for him to penetrate into the Singaporean market, the local press is very supportive. He created a collection recently for Digital Fashion Week, which was picked up and featured in Lianhe Zaobao. The exposure, however, sometimes does not translate to sales. In order to tackle that, he understands that he has to make compromises and tone down his designs to cater to Singaporeans.

"It's hard. It's really hard to kind of enter the market without making certain changes. If you don't, you just can't... But if I want to look at a different market, I have to change to suit the market."

But he does it while making sure the Josiah Chua identity is kept intact.

"I try to create something that I want the market to wear and if it works out then it's good. But I won't do it so aggressively. I will still create pieces according to how I feel, if it takes on then it's good," he says.

Josiah's inspirations stem anywhere from cartoons to Chinese martial art movies, and when he designs, it really is translating a part of his world to wearable form. And if you're wondering if his pieces are for men or women – they don't have a gender and are "interchangeable".

The road to becoming a designer might have been hard, but he has zero regrets. "I wouldn't do things differently, I would still do what I did. The path I chose has brought me opportunities. I think everything happens for a reason – like when you choose to go into this job or not – it leads you to the final point. It's pretty amazing," he smiles.

**MADIHAH WEARS**  
VEST: BLACK DENIM AND NEOPRENE SHELL VEST,  
JOSIAH CHUA, \$159.90  
TOP: TIE BLEACHED DRESS, JOSIAH CHUA, \$89.90  
SKIRT: BLEACHED NEOPRENE ARMoured SKIRT,  
JOSIAH CHUA, \$189.90  
SHOES: STYLIST'S OWN  
RINGS: SILVER MOONSTONE RINGS, TESSELLATE  
CO, FROM \$35

**HEERAJ WEARS**  
TOP: DENIM PULLOVER  
DRAWSTRING: THE AUTHORITY, \$49  
JACKET: LONG BASEBALL JACKET,  
THE AUTHORITY, \$89  
JEANS: PRAS THE BANDIT, \$89  
GLASSES: JULIAN BLACK GRADATION,  
VISUAL MASS, \$95  
BAG: STRAND BRIEFCASE,  
GNOME & BOW, \$385  
BAG (SMALLER): MILTON CROSSBODY  
CLUTCH, GNOME & BOW, \$245





**MADIHAH WEARS**  
TOP: BLEACHED DENIM PANELLED TOP,  
JOSIAH CHUA, \$219  
DRESS (UNDERNEATH): TIE-BLEACHED DRESS,  
JOSIAH CHUA, \$89.90  
CAP: ORIGAMI CAP, JOSIAH CHUA, \$129  
GLASSES: BLAKE VINYL BROWN,  
VISUAL MASS, \$95  
EARRINGS: NADIA DROP EARRINGS,  
TESSELLATE CO, \$29  
RINGS: TESSELLATE CO, \$18.90 EACH

# Visual Mass

Visual Mass started because its owners wanted to solve a problem – glasses were too expensive, and they wanted to do something about it. After a lot of research, travel and experimenting on the part of owners Eddie and Jerial Tan, you can now have affordable and quality eyewear from just \$95. That's not all – for every pair of glasses you purchase, another pair goes to someone in need.

For Eddie and Jerial, apart from producing cost-effective eyewear for the masses, they hope to do something for those in the world who lack proper eye care.

“Because we go to vision screenings, we get to see people in these less-fortunate countries who can't really see at all. Without glasses they think that they are seeing things normally until they put them on. They're actually happier, they can do things better, they can even move better! So that was the point where we realised that even at \$95, which was affordable to us, some people can't afford eyecare,” says Jerial.

“It's funny because glasses were invented about 800 years ago, yet there are still about a billion people who lack access to glasses – meaning they cannot work, see or read properly. That's quite stunning to us,” Eddie adds.

At just 24, both Eddie and Jerial started their involvement in the optometry business right from their National Service days. With just about \$400 forked out from each of their pockets, they purchased samples from China and the business took off from there, burning their weekends by selling glasses at cafes.

Today, Visual Mass sits snugly at orchardgateway, with plans to venture into Asia and the rest of the world. The altruism and chic styles are ones you have to see to believe.

“We want to lead the way for a lot of young brands that're coming up. Even though you're small, you can do something for the community,” says Eddie.



# Tessellate.Co

The love for travel runs in Peh Jing Mei's (who goes by May) blood. From envisioning backpacking through countries rich in culture and heritage like Myanmar and Vietnam, she set out at only 18 years of age and fulfilled that dream on her own. Although she soon enrolled in a university in the United Kingdom to pursue a degree in law and management, her heart was still with the diverse ways of life she had experienced.

She travelled to Nepal and India during her summer break and was captivated by India's intricate jewellery. It was then that she made the decision to drop out of school to create Tessellate.Co, a brand offering handmade jewellery.

This was a problem for her parents and relatives, as she was only 19 at the time. "Everyone was thinking I was crazy, saying, 'Why would you want to drop out of university and do this by yourself? What can you earn from it?'" Her persistence, however, paid off – her parents agreed to let the business continue if it did well for a year.

May added, "It's a personal achievement to quit school to do something I really like. I think that's what a lot of Singaporeans are not doing. They're more into, 'yeah, we'll just get a degree and do this', and following the norm. Breaking apart from the majority is something to be proud of."

Rooted in her passion for travel, May heads to India a few times a year to source for semi-precious stones, and oversees the handcrafting of rings and necklaces, among other products. To study the unique craft of Indian jewellery, she went for a two week course in Bhagsu, where she had to climb a hill for half an hour to reach her classes.


Tessellate.Co is a business that returns what it takes from India. For each sale, a dollar goes to funding Indian schoolgirls' education under the Fior Di Loto Foundation. So far, the 22-year-old has been sponsoring two girls for a year, and plans to update her customers at least once a year on how they have been growing up whenever she visits the school.

"One of the girls that I met, she's the top of the class! I didn't want to be a business that was just a business, I wanted to give something back to society and I thought the best thing to do was to give back to India, because that's where I get most of my things from," she says, smiling fondly.



MADIHAH WEARS  
GLASSES: BLAKE VINYL BROWN,  
VISUAL MASS, \$95  
EARRINGS: TESSELLATE.CO, \$28  
BANGLES: TESSELLATE.CO, \$35 EACH  
RINGS: SILVER MOONSTONE RINGS,  
TESSELLATE.CO, FROM \$35





HEERAJ WEARS  
GLASSES: JULIAN BLACK GRADATION,  
VISUAL MASS, \$95  
JACKET: CONTRAST SLEEVE BOMBER,  
THE AUTHORITY, \$89  
PANTS: BANDING PANTS,  
THE AUTHORITY, \$39

PHOTOGRAPHY BRYAN TAN  
ART DIRECTION & STYLING CLARA  
TAN, GORDON NG & ELIZABETH GOH  
MAKE-UP GERALDINE LEOW OF  
YOUTUBE.COM/USER/IWASAKAIMIYUKI  
MODELS HEERAJ TARANI &  
MADIHAH HAMID

Experience at home-grown e-commerce mainstay Inverted Edge has honed Jasper Goh's business acumen. Where clothes are concerned, at least, he's taking a stab at getting the physical and online dilemma down with The Authority.

Here, you'll find a range of silhouettes informed by Belgian austerity (MM6 by Maison Margiela), German simplicity (Jil Sander), and a distinctly approachable price point. The Authority manages to keep its collections affordable by way of small-batch manufacturing. This reduces the cost of production and prevents building a backlog of unsold inventory.

"We work with a company called APIQUE, which produces for houses like Raoul, Hijack, Self-Portrait. We have a minimum order quantity of 30 instead of the usual, say, 100. So imagine if you had 20 styles a collection, and a 100 pieces each – you could kill yourself already!" says Jasper.

The Authority successfully combines a constantly-changing rack of clothes and an aesthetic that is right on the pulse of fashion today. No surprises then, that each new collection sells out fast.

"People are really returning every three to four days now because they know our styles can be gone in a day. Recently we launched a collection and as I was getting into my car that evening, people started dropping me emails to reserve pieces. The next day, people walked in and demanded 'Where are the leather shorts?' or 'Where is the jacket?' and those pieces sold out in a day. That was nice."

Not content with building disposable fast fashion, Jasper's long term aim for The Authority is to set up a brand that supports and launches the work of other local designers. "We're working with a few young designers now who want to just design clothes. So we help them out with the manufacturing, packaging, branding, business development, and distribution."

# The Authority co.



DRESS: CROCHET DETAIL MAXI  
DRESS, **ETRICAN**, \$56  
SHOE: MODEL'S OWN

# FASHION CAUSE & EFFECT

MEGAN TAN talks to the founders of two local labels committed to making a fashion statement with a purpose

PHOTOGRAPHY COLIN CHAN  
STYLING & MAKE-UP MEGAN TAN  
MODELS XARIA KWA & HEERAJ TARANI

Rumour has it that she's a beauty with a pinch of idiosyncrasy. They tell me she dons herself with tapestries of grace and dignity. But wait a second; the word on the street told me she's superficial. She seeks affection through the eyes of men. Her mind is flighty and hard to grasp. But is she kind? Is she compassionate? I would love to think so. I wonder why no one ever told me this: "Fashion has a conscience too."

Fashion is amorphous. To some, fashion is an exhibition of self-expression, while others merely scorn its superficiality. Yet, there has also been a sea of change on the fashion landscape, with the tides turning toward heightening the awareness of ethical and sustainable clothing with 'conscious fashion' consumerism.

Recently, the limelight has been on big fast-fashion brands such as H&M with the launch of their Conscious collection, and English fashion designer Stella McCartney with her eponymous label supporting and propagating the movement.

Is the 'conscious fashion' movement becoming fashionable locally? Here, we take a look at two local fashion labels that are driven beyond aesthetical appeal and cleverly crafted copies. Although motivated by two fairly different commitments, these brands share a common drive; that is, their tangible contributions to the causes they each uphold.

## **MATTER: Conscious travel wear**

Taking you from the city bar to your next long-haul flight, the pants by **MATTER** are inspired by tradition and refined for modernity. Every creation has a birthplace of its own, and every pair of pants by **MATTER** has an origin of its own. Holding a high regard for provenance, every pair of pants is shipped with the Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates of where it was woven, stitched and printed, along with the story of its weave or print.

Renyung Ho, 30, co-founder of **MATTER**, fondly shared: "Our message is to find out the where and why something is made – we will make better choices when we know those stories, for ourselves and the world."

Centered on its social mission to elevate rural craft and ensure its sustainability as a livelihood for the artisan community, the brand employs time-honoured techniques of the loom and block print to produce compelling textiles and styles. This co-creation between **MATTER** and artisans from Rajasthan offers their consumers luxurious fashion pieces, where 'luxurious' here is not defined by price

alone, but about the time and thought taken into creating pieces of fine craft.

Ms Ho said: "We really believe that people will make good choices if they have equal alternatives, and if provenance of production was made transparent. In that sense, culture and origins represent our two foundation values."

## **ETRICAN; Sustainable fashion**

Etrican is essentially an embodiment of the eco-lifestyle movement channeled through the Singapore's online retail scene. This female-centric brand features a collection of coquettish styles to solve your everyday wardrobe crisis. Not only is the apparel made with Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) 100 per cent certified organic cotton, its accessible and easy-to-wear designs are deliberately created as an effort towards responsible and sustainable consumerism.

As one of Singapore's pioneer green fashion brands, Dragos Necula, 33, co-founder of Etrican, pointed out that sustainable fashion doesn't just start and end with the fabric they use.

"Even our business name cards are printed with recycled paper," Mr Necula remarked playfully as he explained Etrican's multi-pronged approach as a sustainable fashion brand.

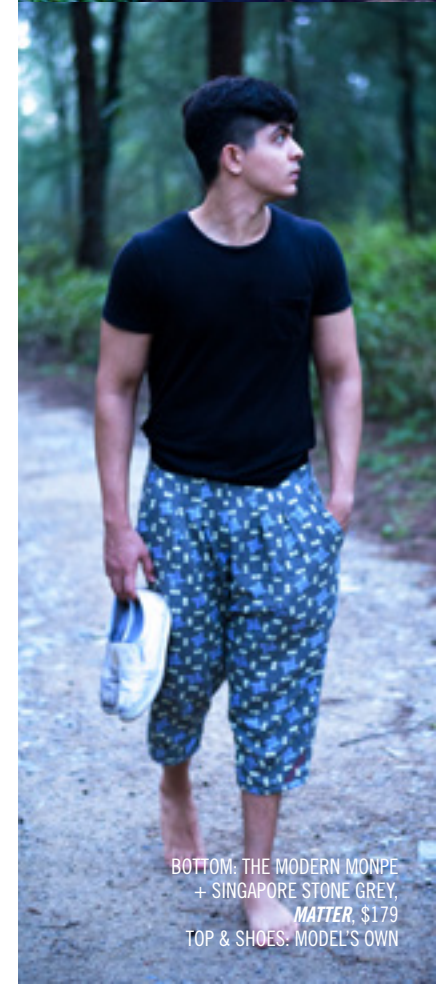
Bearing in mind that sustainability comes with communal efforts, Etrican works directly with their clothing factories as a means to protect the welfare of factory workers. Mr Necula felt that this is a "a better safety margin to ensure that (Etrican's) clothes have been ethically produced."

Raising awareness about its cause through talks at events and interviews has also become an integral part of Etrican's calendar. During its humble beginnings in 2009, not many were acquainted with the idea of eco-friendly and sustainable fashion. Although sustainable fashion in Singapore is admittedly still a niche affair, the movement is steadily amassing a growing number of followers.

Lum Rhong Peng, 21, a frequent shopper, says: "The shopping experience becomes slightly different, in a good way of course, when you know your purchase makes a difference somewhere else in this world."

*Etrican can be found at [etrican.com](http://etrican.com), with t-shirts and dresses from \$40 to \$70. **MATTER** can be found at [matterprints.com](http://matterprints.com) with scarfs and pants from \$140 to \$220.*

BOTTOM: THE SIDESWEPT  
DHOTI+ SINGAPORE SOLAR  
YELLOW, **MATTER**, \$209  
TOP: MODEL'S OWN



BOTTOM: THE MODERN MONPE  
+ SINGAPORE STONE GREY,  
**MATTER**, \$179  
TOP & SHOES: MODEL'S OWN



# npTribune

THE STUDENT VOICE OF Ngee ANN POLYTECHNIC



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## Barbers Go Slick

Whether it is the high-end hair parlour or the neighbourhood barber shop, it's a dapper haircut every Singaporean male loves. ANIQ KAHAR checks some places to get that ideal haircut

With a slew of local high-end barber parlours opening in recent years, such as Hounds of the Baskervilles, Sultans of Shave, Deep Cuts and Truefitt and Hill, the demand for services by such barber parlours has skyrocketed. Customers have to book weeks in advance for a single session. Unlike neighbourhood barbers who usually provide only haircut services, high-end barber parlours provide a range of other services such as wet shaves, facial hair grooming and shaping and facial scrubs.

Apart from the classic looking style and overall vibe of these places, another fresh idea that high-end barbers are bringing into Singapore is inviting international barbers as guest barbers for a certain period of time.

"Sometimes we have guest barbers coming in, just like how tattoo shops have guest tattoo artists coming in from all over the world. Usually, our guest barbers stick around for about a week or two and I think that we're one of the first few barber parlours doing this (in Singapore), so it's really cool," says Feroze Mcleod, 25, owner of Hounds of the Baskervilles, a barber cum tattoo parlour set up in 2012.

Feroze, who is also a tattoo artist, was at first keen to start his business in Australia. "I thought about setting it up in Australia but the traditional barber concept was already being done to death there. So I decided to start up here, where I was raised," said Feroze, who is of Malay and Kiwi descent.

Do traditional neighbourhood barbershops feel threatened by the opening of all these high-end barber parlours? Well, Abdul Kadir Samin, 62, doesn't seem fazed by this new trend. "They cater to different customers," says Abdul Kadir, owner of the Bugs Bunny Barber in Toa Payoh.

"We will just do what we always do – give good haircuts."

Abdul Kadir's barber shop became a big hit among netizens recently, all thanks to Dr Ng Eng Hen, Singapore's Minister for Defence, posting a photo of himself getting a "good and cheap" haircut at Bugs Bunny Barber on his Facebook page. Abdul Kadir's shop has been around in the same exact location since 1971. However, its future is uncertain, as old-school barbers like Abdul Kadir are struggling to find a worthy pair of hands to pass the trade on to. "There have been a few who tried to pick up the trade, but they never lasted," said Abdul Kadir.

Owners of the Red Panther Barber Stylist, brothers Ali Yusuf and Ahmad Yusuf, 61 and 64 respectively, share the same sentiments as Abdul Kadir. Having been around since 1982, the family business faces an uncertain future.

"Young people just don't want to pick up this skill," said Ahmad Yusuf. "Although they do attract young customers, it's a young apprentice that barber shops like theirs really need right now."

### Hounds of the Baskervilles

24 Bali Lane  
Singapore 189860

#### Opening hours

Mon - Fri: 11am - 8pm  
Sat: 11am - 7pm

#### Price

Ranges from \$25 to \$35

### Bugs Bunny Barber

94 Lor 4 Toa Payoh  
Singapore 310094

#### Opening hours

Mon - Thurs: 11am - 8pm  
Sat - Sun: 11am - 7pm

#### Price

Price ranges from \$8 for adults, \$7 for students and \$6 for children

### Red Panther Barber Stylist

Upper Serangoon Shopping Centre  
756 Upper Serangoon Rd, #03-13  
Singapore 534626

#### Opening hours

Mon - Fri: 11am - 8pm  
Sat: 11am - 7pm

#### Price

Ranges from \$8 for adults, \$6 for students and \$5 for children



Delightfully presented, this chilli crab dish tantalises both the eyes and the tastebuds.



## CHALLENGE FOR THE SENSES

CHARISSA JOY NG explores eateries that stimulate your sense of taste with unusual food and unique concepts



Savour authentic Japanese dishes like this yakitori don within what used to be the historical Hua Bee kopitiam.

Hawker centres, food courts, restaurants and cafes are rampant in food-loving Singapore. Perhaps our palates are jaded or we are just adventurous as we keep looking out for that new extraordinary experience.

Food establishments go all out to give their customers an entertaining and memorable experience with their interesting concepts and food.

### Labyrinth: Blending Heritage & Science

The award-winning establishment focuses on delivering the five basic taste sensations: bitter, sweet, sour, salty and umami. You can expect a refreshing fusion of cuisines, where consistency and quality are maintained at the highest standard.

This style of cuisine, pioneered by founder-chef Han Li Guang, is called Neo-Singapore cuisine. He pursues excellence in everything he does. He and his team work hard to give Singaporean dishes a twist, giving it an avant-garde taste while retaining its original flavour.

“The idea of Labyrinth is to provide the unexpected,” he quips.

His style of cuisine is to present the Singapore food-scape and heritage through the lens of food science, avant-gardism, visual illusion and metaphor. It seeks to connect the diner with cherished memories and emotions while at the same time challenging the senses and perceptions.

Three different menus for lunch, dinner and pre-theatre are offered. The pre-theatre menu is only available every Thursday to Saturday and is specially designed for guests to enjoy before they go for their show at the Esplanade.

You can find Labyrinth at Esplanade Mall, #02-23.

### Bincho: Marrying Tradition With Modernity

The restaurant located in Tiong Bahru, is influenced by two traditional concepts – a yakitori-ya, a place selling Japanese skewered meat in Osaka, and Hua Bee, a Chinese coffee shop that is an integral part of Tiong Bahru's heritage, says Ms Amelia Lim, the marketing executive of Unlisted Collections (ULC).

The eating joint sells minced meat noodles, mee pok and Japanese donburi (rice bowl) in the day. Once the sun goes down, the store turns into a modern open-concept yakitori bar.

Formerly known as Hua Bee kopitiam (coffee shop), the shop has been around since the 1940s, and is a historical icon that has been retained till today.

The director of ULC, Mr Loh Lik Peng, wanted to preserve the old-school façade, wall tiles and the ladies who have



Bincho Bar

been cooking mee pok since the olden times to fulfil his vision of marrying history and tradition with modernity.

You'll get to appreciate the mee pok from the old times and the authentic Japanese cuisine whipped up for you by chef Asai Masashi. Quench your thirst at the bar, which features progressive and intriguing Japanese-inspired cocktails.

You can find Bincho at 78 Moh Guan Terrace, #01-19.

### Kombi Rocks: Vintage West Reigns

Surrounded by classic Volkswagen caravans from the 1980s, the restaurant proudly shows off its vintage collection of vehicles, furniture and vintage items.

The quirky vintage ornaments combined with the classic wood-heavy décor give off a mid-80s Western vibe. Despite the Western-influenced interior, the place sells Thai and Chinese cuisine, and customers can savour their food while admiring the collections of the past.

Its green-tiled walls are lined up with posters of the stars of the '80s like the Beatles and retro clocks. Toys from a decade ago are put on display near the counter.

Moreover, you can rent the caravans for a joyride or book the venue for photo shoots and events. Weekly music sessions are held in the diner at night for you to enjoy the music while eating with your friends and family.

This place would be great for music lovers and fans of the '80s and '90s.

You can find Kombi Rocks at 66 Yio Chu Kang Road.

### Nox: Dine in the Dark

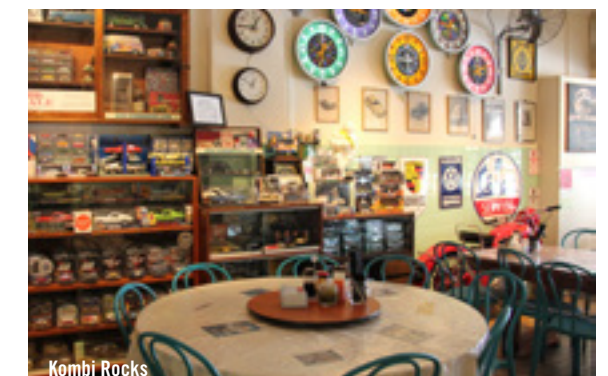
You walk into the restaurant expecting great food and a unique experience. Once your food is delivered to your table, you swipe out your mobile phone to snap a picture. But, it is total darkness. So how do you dig in?

You will be guided by specially trained visually impaired individuals in the pitch-black dining room. A rare dining experience that you can find in Singapore, the roles are reversed where the blind become the eyes of sighted customers. This encounter builds trust, where minds are opened to see the value of their work.

The other four senses are enhanced through this experience. You will get to taste the entire range on the exquisite menu created from the finest ingredients by the restaurant's Chef de Cuisine and his team.

Topping it off with some wine or signature cocktails, this dining experience will surely be one that you will never forget.

You can find Nox at 269 Beach Road.



Kombi Rocks



# MAGIC... OR SIMPLY SCIENCE?

SARAH RACHEL TEO finds out from Chef Han Li Guang this thing called molecular gastronomy

Spherification. Foams. *Sous vide*. Sound complex? But have you ever wondered how dessert pearls that burst in your mouth, *teh tarik* foam and popping candy are made?

Molecular gastronomy has become hugely popular in recent times, and it does sound daunting.

Also known as the “modernist cuisine”, “experimental cuisine” or “avant-garde cuisine”, this cooking method is defined as blending “physics and chemistry to transform the tastes and textures of food,” according to molecularrecipes.com.

Molecular gastronomy methods have been around for many years, says chef-owner Han Li Guang, 30, of Labyrinth, which won the Best Asian Fine Dining Restaurant for RAS Epicurean Star Award 2015.

“In fact, if you actually go deeper, you will find a lot of similarities in what we have already – it’s all out there already!” says Chef Han.

Ferran Adria, Head Chef of El Bulli restaurant in Spain and pioneer of this movement, found the use of *agar agar* in Japan, and as Chef Han lightly puts it: “He went back (to Spain) and said, ‘*Agar agar* is molecular, it’s amazing! You can make jellies that won’t melt!’

But we’ve been eating *agar agar* since we were kids, long before he discovered *agar agar*.”

To put it simply, molecular gastronomy, no matter how scientifically scary it sounds, has been around for a long time – and it is everywhere!

Chef Han provides two examples of common foods that seem like molecular gastronomy: dessert pearls and *teh tarik* foam. The pearls involve spherification, which is the process of shaping liquids into ball-like spheres, while the creation of foam in *teh tarik* is caused by aeration, a process whereby air is added into a substance to enhance its flavour or texture.

However, he emphasises that these do not make the creators of the product molecular chefs. Ultimately, he goes back to the point that molecular gastronomy is found all around us but “people suddenly needed a name to define this cooking style”.

“It’s everywhere! If you want to define it, it’s molecules. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the things we eat. That’s molecular gastronomy. It’s science, it’s about understanding the science behind everything we do, everything we eat, everything we drink.”

## MORE THAN JUST FOAM

### Foamy Drinks

Foams are typically made by adding air into the substance through whipping, with a form of stabiliser such as soy lecithin. In *teh tarik* for instance, condensed milk in the tea, “already has natural soya lecithin inside”, says Chef Han. Other common “foamy drinks” include cappuccino and latte. In molecular cuisine, it is used for soups and purees, and can even create espuma which is a very thick, moose-like foam, using a siphon bottle similar to the whipped cream bottle.

### Popping Pearls

The pearls are made using reverse spherification, a technique whereby the liquid is mixed with calcium salt, in the form of calcium lactate or calcium lactate gluconate, and dropped into a sodium alginate bath. The reaction creates a thin layer around the liquid drops while containing the liquid inside it so that it pops in your mouth!

### Agar agar

*Agar agar*, also known as *kanten* in Japan, is a jelly-like substance that is able to hold together a liquid. Though it is very common to find *agar* jelly in Asia, it is used to create gels, *agar* spaghetti, and noodles and to reduce the formation of crystals in ice cream in molecular gastronomy.

### Popping candy

Remember the sweets we used to eat in primary school that fizzes in our mouth? Popping candy, also known as gassified sugar, is made out of sugar that contains carbon dioxide, which comes from mixing acid and baking soda or directly adding in the gas. When the sugar comes into contact with a liquid, it will start to fizz!

Kueh Bangkit

# Sweets From The Heart

Love letters, *kueh bangkit*, *bakwa* and pineapple tarts top the list of Chinese New Year goodies. ANIQ KAHAR, TAN HUIRONG and TAN JIN HENG hunt down the best – and discover other worthy treats

Chinese New Year goodies may line the shelves of many supermarkets and neighbourhood bakeries. These assembly-line sweets may be palatable but what’s lacking could be the heart and soul that make every bite memory-worthy.

Throw out the idea of sheer convenience, do some legwork and you can actually find real treats – treats that many have enjoyed for years from the same familiar places.

### Beauty World Niang Re Gao’s Love Letters

The Niang Re Gao stall boasts delectable love letters (crispy egg and coconut rolls) that owner Mrs Susan Lai says are handmade. She and her husband, Mr Lai Chong Lee, have been running the stall for a whopping 41 years now.

Originally situated at the now-defunct Beauty World Market, it moved about 30 years ago to its new base right beside the escalator at the Beauty World complex.

Although they offer a wide array of handmade Chinese New Year goodies, the one that resonates most with customers is their love letters (\$10/box), which are sold out within a week or two. While love letters tend to crumble easily, those from Niang Re Gao stay perfectly fine even though the pancakes are paper-thin.

“The key to a good love letter is to roll it up narrowly; that way it would [not break and crumble easily],” Mrs Lai reveals. “It is also important to

maintain the right balance of coconut milk and flour.”

Despite technological advances, Niang Re Gao has not used social media or any form of online publicity to promote their goodies. However, OpenRice.com has published numerous positive reviews about the stall’s goodies. Word of mouth ensures that the stall retains a steady stream of loyal customers.

Also try: Pineapple tarts (\$10/box), mini *popiah* rolls (\$11/box) and *sambal* rolls (\$10/box).

### Kele’s Pineapple Balls

What makes a good pineapple tart is not just the moist pineapple paste but also the firm buttery pastry that does not crumble easily.

The pineapple tarts (\$23.80/tin) from Kele, founded about 32 years ago, have been featured in multiple newspapers and in Singapore Airlines’ SilverKris magazine.

Even though their pineapple tarts are the rave, they were not the bakery’s



initial core product. Kele first started selling an assortment of bread and Chinese New Year snacks including love letters, and shrimps rolls.

Kele realised that the pineapple paste on their tarts got really dry due to exposure to air. To resolve that, they started forming balls to keep the pineapple jam within. These became an instant hit with their customers.

Improvements did not just stop there. Mr Adrian Ang, the second generation in the family business, and his team come up with new and unique flavours for the pineapple balls every year.

Not all unique flavours go down well with the customers. Last year, Kele rolled out curry leaf pineapple balls but stopped production after a week when customers gave them the thumbs down. However, the golden cheese pineapple balls are very popular.

“Over the years [especially during Chinese New Year] orders for our pineapple tarts kept increasing, [such that] we had to shift to a bigger premise even though it is slightly inaccessible,” says Mr Ang, who declines to reveal how many pineapple balls they sell each year.

To purchase a tin of Kele’s amazing pineapple balls, you would have to travel down to Jurong Food Hub located in the middle of an industrial area with only a bus that goes in every 15 minutes.

Also try: Almond Cookies, *Kueh Bangkit* and Shrimp rolls (all \$18.80 a tin), golden cheese pineapple balls (\$25.80 a tin).

**Kim Choo Kueh Chang’s *Kueh Bangkit***  
Many of us have heard of the amazing *bak chang* from Kim Choo Kueh Chang, located at 60 Joo Chiat place.

However, during Chinese New Year, the top seller is their *Kueh Bangkit* (\$14.80 a tin). What makes Kim Choo Kueh Chang *kueh bangkit* truly delightful is that it is firm to the touch and melts in your mouth. The taste and scent of coconut milk is just right and it is not too sweet thus making it extremely difficult for us to stop at just one or two pieces.

“Our *kueh bangkit* are all made by hand which [explains the fluctuation in production],” chirped Mr Edmund Wong, one of the three owners of Kim Choo. “It’s easy to see that it is handmade, just lay all our *kueh bangkit* out on the table and you will realise that [they are] all of different sizes and shapes!”



Almond Cookies

It is no wonder Scene.sg has listed Kim Choo Kueh Chang’s *kueh bangkit* as the best *kueh bangkit* in Singapore.

Madam Kim Choo started the Kim Choo Kueh Chang stall as a means to raise her children. Her *bak chang* (meat dumplings) became such a success that when her children took over, they decided to provide an array of Peranakan delights such as *ang ku kueh* and *kueh sagu*. Now in the hands of the third generation, Kim Choo Kueh Chang has re-positioned itself as a brand that not only sells authentic Peranakan goodies but also one that keeps the Peranakan culture alive, for example through outreach programmes.

Mr Wong believes that the human touch is what makes Kim Choo Kueh Chang truly special. “We are facing a serious lack of manpower. [The] Singapore government have encouraged us to transition into relying on machinery to [resolve the issue] but we [simply] cannot risk the quality of our goods just to be more profitable,” Mr Wong adds.

Also try: Pineapple tarts (\$18.80/tin), *sugee* cookies (15.80/tin) and *pandan* folded love letters (\$16/tin).



**Ng Kim Lee Confectionery’s Almond Cookies**

An old-school bakery, Ng Kim Lee Confectionery stands out among the countless modern cafes that have sprouted across the street. Located at Chun Tin Road, it was founded in the 1960s.

The confectionery offers a wide array of Teochew-style snacks such as *Xi Bing* or Western pastries such as their UFO muffins, and has a loyal customer base. The confectionery has received rave reviews – an average of four out of five stars – on HungryGoWhere.com.

The current Ng family member running the shop – Mr Gabriel Ng, 29 – belongs to the third generation.

Taking over after graduation and a few jobs thereafter, Mr Ng says that his time at Ng Kim Lee Confectionery has taught him many valuable skills such as baking and interpersonal skills that have made his life more meaningful.

“I really enjoy working here, interacting with my customers and constantly trying to improve Ng Kim Lee’s range of products,” he adds. “For example, our *tau sar piah* (bean paste biscuits) is more moist than others and our almond cookies are soft and slightly buttery. My customers frequently say that they love our almond cookies for the softness.”

Soft it is indeed, although this means that you would have to handle the cookies more gently. It falls apart almost instantaneously in your mouth.

These almond cookies (\$7/tin) are not only made by hand but also created from a secret recipe passed down within the Ng family.

While the tightly guarded secret recipe is what keeps customers coming back for more, it also means there is no room for business expansion.

Mr Ng says: “There is a risk that our recipe would be sold to others; that is why [my grandparents] forbid us to teach outsiders.”

Also try: Diamond-shaped egg tarts (\$0.70/piece), *tau sar piah* (\$0.80/piece) and pineapple *piah* (\$0.70/piece).

**Kim Hock Guan’s *Bakwa***

Talk about *bakwa* (barbecued pork slices) in Singapore and at least two names come to mind – Lim Chee Guan and Bee Cheng Hiang. Yet, although Kim Hock Guan may not be a household name, it was already in business in 1905.

Its famous *bakwa* was introduced here by the hardworking Mr Lim Chwee Guan, who left his hometown in Fujian Province, China, to seek a better life. During his early years in Singapore, Mr Lim missed a food unique to his hometown. That was when he decided to recreate the barbecued meat that we have now come to consider a delicacy.

Loyal customer and taxi driver, Mrs Carol Sng, 50, says: “It’s the fragrance of sliced meat. Many stores uses minced meat because it is much more tender and easier to handle but sliced meat has a more authentic taste.”

Mr Wilfred Lim, who is in charge of running Kim Hock Guan, adds: “The traditional way of making *bakwa* [is to] use sliced meat instead of minced meat. This [will] retain the

taste and texture of each individual slice, enhancing its richness.”

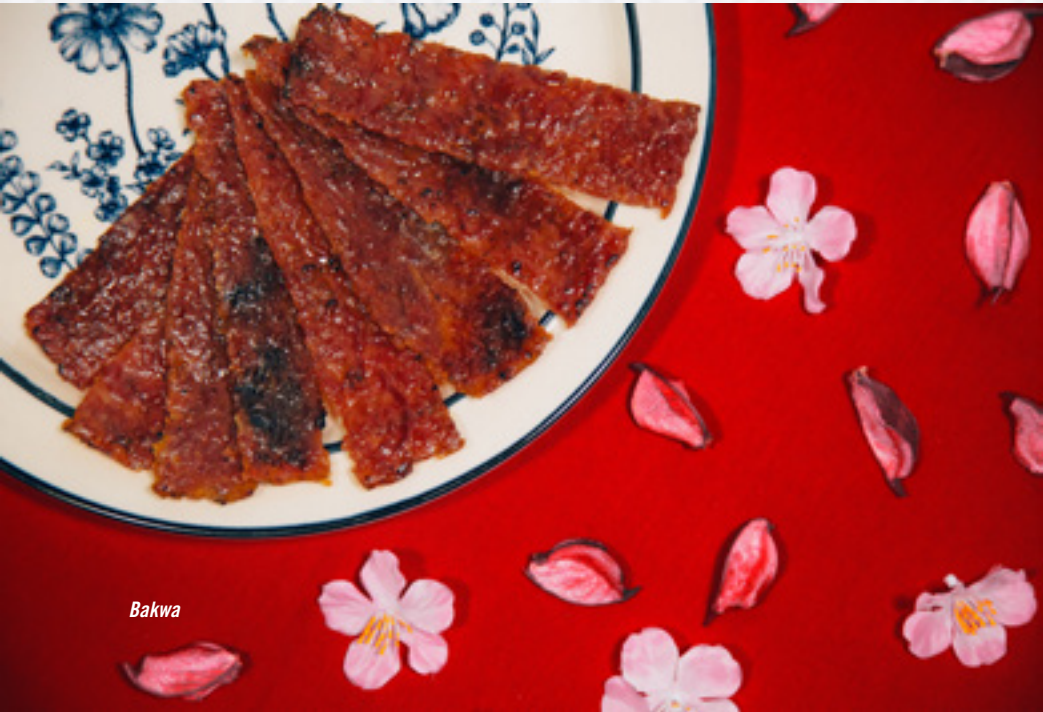
So it’s no wonder that even today, customers from Hong Kong, Taiwan and other neighbouring countries still travel all the way to Singapore just to get a bite of this hearty delight.

Mr Lim is the fourth generation of his family to be running the business, and he takes great pride in his family history. “Our *bakwa* is a well known local specialty,” beams Mr Lim. “We retain only the finest traditions in making them. We still make our *bakwa* by hand even up till the packaging stage. That way we retain the authenticity and you won’t find this elsewhere.”

Also try: Spicy barbecued pork (\$52/kg) and gold coin *bakwa* (\$55/kg).



Love Letters



Bakwa





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Yum Mamuang



Sunomono Cucumber Salad



Chinese Rojak

## Asian Salad Spree

When you think of salads, two words come to mind: health and diet. Well, it's true that salads are about healthy diets to a certain extent, but "you are what you eat," says Dr Sofia Amarra, 59, a PhD holder in Nutrition. "Your diet should be sufficient in terms of quality and quantity, not in excess as to cause obesity or too little to cause malnutrition," she adds.

You could go easy on the dressing if you're afraid that it will add on to your daily calorie intake. Dr Amarra recommends eating salads for meals if you're watching your weight as they are low in calories but high in nutrients.

### Yu Sheng

This Chinese salad is traditionally tossed at family gatherings during the Lunar New Year. It is made up of shredded greens and white radish, red pickled ginger, carrots, cucumbers, pomelo, fried crackers, crushed nuts, and raw fish, topped with plum sauce and other spices to enhance the flavour.

"The taste of *Yu Sheng* is very different from Western salads," explains Lau Lye Kian, 45, lady boss of a *Yu Sheng* business at Hua Yu Wee Seafood Restaurant. "*Yu Sheng* is more sweet, while Western salads tend to be sour," she adds.

However, *Yu Sheng* is only available during the Lunar New Year festive period in supermarkets or restaurants, and its cost ranges from \$20 to \$30 for the small sets which serves about two to three people.

### Yum Mamuang

If *Yu Sheng* is for the sweet-toothed, *Yum Mamuang*, or green mango salad, is an absolute must-try for those who love the sour notes. This popular Thai dish is rich in flavour and great as a light meal, noted Peh Yi Yan, 19, a fervent salad consumer.

The combination of the sourness of shredded green mangoes and the sweet and spicy dressing results in a fresh and tangy taste. Crushed peanuts and dried shrimps add a welcoming crunch to the salad texture.

*Yum Mamuang* is available at most Thai restaurants, such as BaliThai, Nakhon Kitchen, SuanThai and Siam Kitchen for about \$5 to \$11.

### Chinese Rojak

A local delicacy known to represent the diversity of Singapore. This concoction is made of chopped apples, pineapples, cucumbers, turnip, bean sprouts, bean curd puffs, and dough fritters. The dressing is a blend of fermented prawn paste, sugar, lime juice, tamarind juice and crushed peanuts. It is great to be eaten as a meal on its own as it has a healthy mix of carbohydrates, fruits, and vegetables. Sold at most coffee shops island-wide, it costs about \$2.50 to \$3.50 a plate.

### Gado-Gado

*Gado-Gado* is also drenched in sweet and mildly-spicy peanut sauce, but its contents are quite different. This Indonesian salad contains potatoes,

TAY YU YAN goes beyond the Caesar salad to find greens for the Asian palate

tofu, bean sprouts, long beans, egg and *tempeh*. The dish is normally eaten with *ketupat*, compressed rice cakes, a staple food for Indonesians. *Gado-Gado* typically costs \$2.50 to \$4 a plate.

### Japchae Salad

If you're into the Korean pop culture, you've probably heard of *Japchae*, a Korean-style salad made up of stir-fried carrots, green onions, mushrooms and spinach mixed in sesame oil with boiled glass noodles. This sweet, nutrient-packed dish is bliss to the tastebuds, but a threat to the waistline because of the amount of sugar and oil used in the making.

You can usually find *Japchae* at most Korean food outlets, including the Korean barbecue houses. *Japchae* is typically \$8 to \$10 per plate.

### Sunomono Cucumber salad

*Sunomono* is a Japanese term for vinegar-based dishes. It may not be as familiar to you as *Rojak*, but nonetheless, it is worth a try for its unique sweet and sour taste. Although it is not usually sold in stores, this dish is easy to make. All you have to do is mix some sliced cucumbers in vinegar, sugar, and soy sauce. You might choose to add some *wakame* seaweed for variance in texture and additional flavour.

Here's a little extra tip if you're trying to maintain your weight. "Take salads for dinner so that there will be no extra calories before bedtime," says Dr Amarra.

Photos courtesy of pixabay.com, coolhewitt23 on rgbstock.com and stu\_spivack on flickr.com



# Unveiling The City of Four Faces

RIZQINA MAHDZAR explores Phnom Penh to shed light on the emerging city

When 23-year-old NUS undergraduate Hafidz Zayn travelled to the capital of Cambodia for the first time last year, he had no idea what he was in for.

There he was strolling out of the airport, excited by the novelty of being somewhere new, only to be greeted by a throng of Cambodian men rushing towards him, all eager to get him on their tuk-tuks.

Imagine the blur of exchange between words in a mixture of Khmer and broken English, then feeling dazed as he rides towards the immediate rush of traffic, vehicles driving in the wrong direction as the hot wind brushes against his face.

Imagine you are there and a local friend takes you on an insider tour

around the city, bringing you to places you never knew existed. Twice in a row you deal with culture shock; first, the initial third-world impression you had of Phnom Penh, and then, the realisation of how developed it actually is.

Few know that the City of Four Faces is actually a food haven that serves up international cuisines, including French, Korean, and Mexican food alongside the local delicacies. Scores of restaurants and cafes decked in modern décor have also sprung up, serving quality food and coffee at affordable prices.

That same afternoon Hafidz arrived, his friend decided to bring him to the Java Café & Gallery for lunch. Well known for its monstrous burgers that

*“I was surprised to find that Phnom Penh is quite modern. I was missing out on so much because I always believed that there was a poor standard of living.”*

- Hafidz Zayn

cost less than USD\$10 and 100 per cent pure organic Arabica coffee, the café marries a luxurious European-style décor that spans two floors with an art gallery featuring works by local artists.

Another notable place is the Sugar & Spice Garden Café. Founded by Daughters of Cambodia, the non-profit organisation helps victims of sex trafficking by providing them with on-the-job training to help them live independently.

With white curtains and drapes accompanying cozy sofa sets for customers, this quaint-looking place could very well be a Tumblr user's dream café. Incorporating wood and their signature blue over two levels, the atmosphere perfectly complements their light menu choices, including sandwiches, crepes, soups and salads.

Central Market, Phnom Penh



Java Cafe & Gallery, Phnom Penh



La Croisette, Phnom Penh

*“Everything here is changing very fast; the standard of living is starting to catch up with the West, and the infrastructures have improved significantly over the years. This includes the quality of the service sector, as well as more resources for health and education, and outlets for entertainment.”*

- Adrienne Ravez

“I was surprised to find that Phnom Penh is quite modern. I was missing out on so much because I always believed that there was a poor standard of living,” said Hafidz.

He isn't the only one with this sentiment. According to a recent poll done by HYPE with over 100 youths, 56 per cent of them believe that the capital is still in an undeveloped state.

Several respondents blamed the media for its constant portrayal of Cambodia as a third-world country, often highlighting issues such as poverty.

While these issues do persist, the country is progressing rapidly. Digital trends in Cambodia are at an all-time high, with a 414 per cent increase in the number of active Internet users since January 2014.

With the country becoming more technologically savvy, the economy has also started to boom. In 2014, a US\$200 million (S\$290 million) shopping mall was opened by Japanese conglomerate Aeon in Phnom Penh, making it the biggest mall in Cambodia. Built on over 100,000 square metres of land, Aeon Mall comprises four levels with over 190 stores including an ice rink, a bowling alley and a seven-screen movie theatre.

Adrienne Ravez, co-founder of a digital solutions company who has resided in Phnom Penh for three years, can attest to the claim of emerging markets there.

“Everything here is changing very fast; the standard of living is starting to catch up with the West, and the infrastructures have improved significantly over the years. This includes the quality of the service sector, as well as more resources for health and education, and outlets for entertainment,” said the 33-year-old.

If you're a movie buff, for only US\$3.50, you can relax on a huge theatre bed while watching as many movies as you want on a big screen at the Flicks Community Movie Houses, the sole independent and volunteer-run indoor theatres in Phnom Penh.

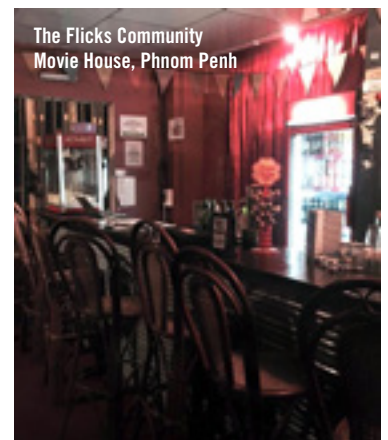
If you prefer something more exciting, head for the boxing arena at Cambodia Television Network's studio to watch some of the biggest names in Kun Khmer, Cambodia's national sport of kickboxing, take on each other in the ring. Sit among locals and join in the cheer for free as you experience the intensity of the matches.

Although Phnom Penh is more than its cultural and historical sites, you should definitely not miss the Royal Palace or the Killing Fields on your first visit to the capital. The capital marries the best of both worlds – mixing its rich history with rapid modernisation.

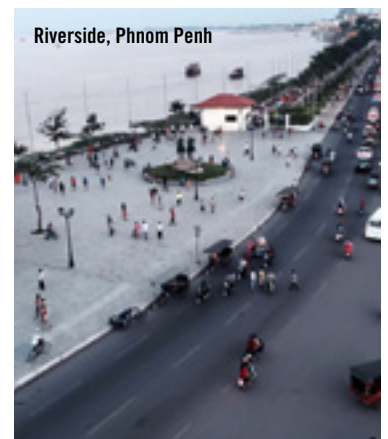
So, the next time you feel like making a short getaway and are contemplating between cities like Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh, be sure to include Phnom Penh on your list.



Le Moon, Phnom Penh



The Flicks Community Movie House, Phnom Penh



Riverside, Phnom Penh



Live Kun Khmer matches in CTN Studio, Phnom Penh



# Beach, You Got It

Eat and breathe a piece of nirvana that only Asia has to offer, CLARA TAN shares

Life's a beach – at least when the sound of crashing waves and the rays of warm sunlight are what greets you every morning.

Now, picture this: the sight of palm trees and beautiful people in bathing suits frolicking along the coastline, all while sipping on a glass of pina colada. Sounds like a scene out of Hawaii Five-O or C.S.I Miami?

Well, there's not a need to think that far, for Asia satisfies the ultimate R&R holiday you've been dreaming of for the longest time. Apart from its tropical weather and exotic food, Asia is also known throughout the world as a land of culture and traditions. And whether you're travelling alone or not, the full package that our neighbouring countries have to offer best are at the islands – relaxation from day to night.

To avoid the extreme humidity but yet be able to soak in the sun accompanied with occasional wind, November through February would be the best time to go, albeit it also being the most filled with tourists. Nevertheless, the more the merrier.

Jaclynn Seah, 31, founder of travel blog The Occasional Traveler, loves the different experience Southeast Asia brings.

“Southeast Asia in comparison with the rest of the world is quite cheap which is one great way to stretch your travel dollar, and the culture and lifestyle seems so different from everything we see about the predominantly western thinking on the media,” she said.

Outdoor enthusiast, Charity Chan, for a fact thinks that although a beach holiday provides for peace and serenity, it really depends on the individual's preference. The 20-year-old shared: “It's a place for you to sunbathe, pack lesser



Rai Leh Beach, Krabi, Thailand



Paradise Island, Maldives

clothes. I guess it depends on your personality, what kind of holiday you're looking for. If you're more of the shopper, then obviously you go for the shopping mall, but if you're more of the type who wants to enjoy reading a book in the quiet, and enjoy nature, then I guess the beach is the perfect destination.”

According to an article published in 2005 by The Telegraph, a beach sojourn also brings with it a myriad of advantages: good for the soul, strengthening of muscles from riding waves, a toned body and less wrinkled skin from splashing in seawater, and of course, getting a healthy glow from basking in the sun.

But apart from all its aesthetic benefits, what a beach holiday really offers is a getaway from the hustle and bustle

*“If you're more of the type who wants to enjoy reading a book in the quiet, and enjoy nature, then I guess the beach is the perfect destination.”*

- Charity Chan

of city life. You'll find that the finest seafood tastes best straight out from a humble local grill, and the greatest cultural experiences come from a tuk-tuk ride instead of a museum.

The goodness that Asia has to offer is fortunately just a two-hour flight away from Singapore. Now let's get packing, and don't forget to slap on sunscreen (or tanning oil, for that matter).

Here are five beaches to choose from depending on your budget.

## Patong Beach, Phuket (Price range: \$150-\$160)

This one's for the party animal. Known as the most famous tourist resort in Phuket, be enthralled with its beach activities by day, and buzzing entertainment and partying by night. Maximise your holiday experience even when the sun sets with its wide array of restaurants, bars and discos. Though crowded, it isn't filled with litter. “The sand was so soft and clean, and you wouldn't spot a single piece of rubbish as the tourists would pick up whatever food and drinks they have before they leave. There's also designated areas just to throw your rubbish, so I think that contributed to the cleanliness of the beach,” said Farhanah Mazlan, 26.

## Dream Beach, Bali (Price range: \$150-\$180)

Dream Beach is the ultimate dream come true for nature lovers. Surrounded not by an overboard of tourists but cliffs, the spectacular view from the top is second to none – which only calls for the perfect Instagram shot. For Charity, though she could not do much swimming because of the strong waves, just soaking in the water was splendid enough. “When you climb up – there are a lot of cliffs surrounding the bay area – and when you take photos, they're very nice. So there's the blue and white gradient in the water and it's very refreshing; and the waves will have this mist when they hit the cliffs. But on the beach itself, it's nice because when you play with the water, it's very cold and you feel like you're being pushed by the current,” she said.

## Phi Phi Islands, Krabi (Price range: \$200-\$300)

Here's the best part about Phi Phi Islands: it's surrounded not just by one beach or island, but a few. Vinice Yeo, 19, who recently went on a five-day trip to Krabi with her friends, recalls: “Many people associate beach vacations in Thailand to be fun and wild, with water skiing sports and the like. Leave that to Pattaya. In Krabi, it really is about appreciating nature and the wonders of the sea with snorkeling activities. I would recommend signing up for a guided tour as they would really bring you around to every island, with lunch provided at that.”

## Boracay, Philippines (Price range: \$600-\$700)

Literally known as White Beach, this world-famous location welcomes everyone from the beach bums to adrenaline junkies. Alvin Soo, 27, co-founder of travel blog livelaughtravel.net, credits Boracay as his favourite beach destination in Asia. “The thing about Boracay is that it's a bit hard to get there. Just getting there you have to take a plane and change to a bus and then take a boat. So getting there is a bit tough, but I think that also deters people from going there, which then in turn also makes the beach very intact and un-ruined in that sense. The beaches there are white and pristine and the waters there are perfect,” he said.

## Maldives (Price: \$900)

The Maldives is probably the ultimate place for a beach vacation. You don't even have to travel to get to the beach, as the clear sand and waters greet you right at your doorstep. Though comparable to a city destination price wise, it definitely is worth saving up for. Whether it's travelling with your significant other or bunch of close friends, be engulfed with happiness the minute you step foot onto shore. For Siew Qi Rui, 19, she took the opportunity to get some family time. “We literally just ate, slept, and swam, and then feed the sharks and stingrays at nights. That's how my family does holidays and spends time together,” she recalled.



# It's A Man's World

LEE HAO WEI explores Tianjin's most famous shopping hub – Taobao Street – and discovers that men can have just as great a shopping spree as women

Lively, vibrant and bustling – it's another typical day at the always jam-packed Taobao Street (*Taobao Jie*) in Tianjin, China. Shopkeepers are shouting their lungs out to attract the attention of shoppers, who are shoving one another and pushing their way through the seemingly endless rows of stores packed to the brim with bags, shoes, clothes, kitchenware, collectibles and whatever you can imagine.

Located at 183 Jin Tang Road, Taobao Street – it's not related to Taobao of online shopping fame – was set up in 2008 and is one of the many wholesale streets in Tianjin. Shoppers continue to be fascinated by the vast array of items available, with clothes being the highlight.

Many consider Taobao Street to be a shopping heaven for women. A review in TripAdvisor says that Taobao Street is more of a "woman's paradise" and does not have much to offer men.

Mr Chen Xiaoyang, 22, a Guangzhou national remarks: "This is my first time here at Taobao Street and I really feel that there are way fewer stores for men compared to women."



This narrow, mobbed street has over 1000 stalls waiting for you to explore!



High quality items at wholesale prices!

However, even though stores for men make up only 30 per cent here (about 270 out of 1,200 stores), the street still has great loot for men and is worth a visit.

As you stroll down the narrow lanes and start to explore the various stores for men, you will be able to uncover a diverse collection of apparel, from graphic shirts to trendy shoes. Not only do the stores feature unique designs and daring styles, these clothes are trendy and are likely to appeal more to younger men.

"I still enjoy the wide range of items though, especially the denim jackets and high-cut boots. There is really nothing you won't be able to find at this place," Mr Chen exclaims.

Madam Xia Jing, 37, a shopkeeper, says proudly: "Many branded retail stores [in the city] focus more on the middle-aged. Here at Taobao Street, our clothes are catered more to youngsters."

## Taobao Tactics

Know the tips and tricks for a successful bargain, as Natasha Tan finds out

It's a war zone in Taobao Street. Bargaining can be fun, when you know how to play the game. Get armed with a smooth tongue and a lot of persuasive power.

- Curb your excitement! Appear nonchalant and uninterested even if something catches your eye. Shopkeepers will be more eager to sell the item to you, and that's your signal to start bargaining.
- Being able to understand and speak Mandarin is definitely a plus point. A common platform of communication always makes conversing easier.
- Being the first customer of the day makes a mighty difference. Shopkeepers are more willing to give in to you as they want to make a first successful sale, believing that this will bring them good luck.

She adds: "Young lads these days like to stand out in clothes such as striped shirts and ripped jeans, which is why we have incorporated such designs here."

Trends aside, what is a wholesale street without low prices? These astonishingly cheap products are probably what sets Taobao Street apart from other retail stores. According to an article in baike.com, sweaters here are priced at only about 20 yuan (\$4.50) and Korean-styled shirts cost a mere 20 to 30 yuan.

Ms Chen Fang, 23, a shopkeeper at Taobao Street, explains: "Before working here, I worked at a wholesale store in Beijing. I have also been to Da Hutong and other retail stores before. In comparison, Taobao Street offers the lowest prices."

Low-priced reproductions of branded goods, including Hollister shirts and New Balance shoes, are a common sight. The look and feel of these products are as good as the real deal themselves! Despite copyright issues and piracy laws, it takes a man of steel not to succumb to the lure of these fakes when it's all about getting great deals.

"You're buying an identical product, but you're paying more for an authentic one when you can get an A-grade replica for half the price," shopkeeper Mr Zhao Zhizhi, 35, shares excitedly.

However, even with the low prices, customers are guaranteed that the quality is never compromised.

As the day comes to a close and the bustling street quiets down, shoppers leave Taobao Street contented with their hands grasping plastic bags. No doubt, all this pushing and shoving weren't in vain, and you have just discovered a man's shopping haven in these narrow streets.



# A Twist In Time

NG JING ZHI takes a step into Tianjin's past when foreign concessions ruled and horse carriages were the way to travel in style



In the beginning, there was the open sea – a blank canvas. Hundreds of years passed, and land began taking shape in this northeastern region of China. Foreigners from faraway lands found the area an ideal trading place and thus established concessions – filling the canvas with doodles.

Today, these doodles are seen not as flaws but instead as unique additions to a masterpiece. One of the best places to see these architectural marks left behind by the foreigners is at the Five Boulevards. Located in the Heping District, tucked deep in the heart of Tianjin, [easytourchina.com](http://easytourchina.com) describes the popular tourist destination as being made up of 22 roads spanning across 1.28 square kilometres.

Featured in a recent nine-part documentary by China's CCTV9, the former British concession was home to more than 200 celebrities and government organisations from the late 19th to the early 20th century.

"There are numerous prominent people who have taken up residence at the Five Boulevards before, including government bodies such as Presidents and Premiers, and even the fourth

***"I think they chose to preserve the buildings for two reasons – its historical value, and to prevent the architecture from wasting away due to neglect."***

***- Zhao Shizhi***

Prince of the Qing dynasty," says Mr Han Baolin, a guide for horse carriage rides there. "The houses have architectural styles stemming from different parts of Europe, such as England, France and Germany, as well as from diverse periods, such as the romantic, baroque and gothic eras."

Today, these homes have either been preserved or transformed into places for recreation. The Xiannong Block, for instance, has been repurposed with high-end cafés and restaurants. The Tianjin Historical Architecture Restoration and Development

Corporation had carried out the project and aimed to maintain the design and architecture of the buildings while improving their functionality.

"I think they chose to preserve the buildings for two reasons – its historical value, and to prevent the architecture from wasting away due to neglect," says Zhao Shizhi, a 19-year-old student.

For history buffs and lovers of architecture, a horse carriage ride will take you through the highlights of the Five Boulevards and enlighten you on the background of each place, all while allowing you to feast your eyes on the myriad of houses.

Should you want to take things at your own pace, you can opt to explore the area by bicycle or foot. Don't worry about getting lost – you can either pick up a map from the Tourist Information Centre or keep an eye out for the large, bronze maps peppered all over the Five Boulevards.

The only drawback is that a majority of the houses are closed to visitors, with plaques providing a short snippet of who had once occupied the estate.

***"The houses are like toddlers – they may not be able to speak, but if you take time to understand them, you will be able to unveil the secrets hidden behind the walls."***

***- Ms Song Yuan***

An article from the China Daily website said that it is difficult to truly appreciate the architecture and history of a house simply by looking at it through locked gates.

However, Ms Song Yuan, a colleague of Mr Han's, begs to differ. "The houses are like toddlers – they may not be able to speak, but if you take time to understand them, you will be able to unveil the secrets hidden behind the walls."

Houses are not the only things you get to admire at the Five Boulevards – with nature weaving its way through every nook and cranny, you might just stumble upon alleys or open driveways adorned with fragrant blooms. According to Ms Song, the best time to visit the place would be in early April, when the trees and flowers start to blossom again.

She said with glee: "There are crabapple trees at Dalidao and they're absolutely beautiful when in full bloom – just like the cherry blossoms in Japan. Out of the 365 days in a year, they only stay open for about 10. They're fantastic and definitely worth taking a look at."

Shizhi agrees, "Spring is when nature looks its best, where the colours are especially vibrant, fresh and has this tenderness of new life. It is unlike in winter, when they're all covered in layers of dirt and dust."

As the demand for more tourist destinations increases, the buildings are being awakened from their deep slumber, years of sleep erased with fresh coats of paint and new fixtures. Take the Minyuan Stadium for example – located in the centre of the Five Boulevards, it was torn down and underwent renovation works from 2012 to 2014. Now open to the public, the prominent infrastructure features a running track and large open spaces that are ideal for picnics. Restaurants, bars and cafés have also opened their doors for business at the stadium.

"This place is constantly undergoing changes. Repair works and retouches to buildings are done ever so often, especially for the older ones, so as to maintain its original state," says Mr Han. "More and more houses and buildings are being opened up for tourists to explore, and they are turned into museums or places for dining."

While development provides more business opportunities and an area to generate revenue, some, such as Shizhi, are not so keen on the idea of transforming the entire place.

"I hope this place will stay just the way it is. If the entire city is filled with skyscrapers and tall buildings, then it will look the same everywhere, and the significance of the Five Boulevards will be lost."



Designed after London's Stamford Bridge, Minyuan Stadium bears a touch of English class.

**Crowds flock to the Minyuan Stadium, a lovely hang out spot for friends and family with plenty of photo taking opportunities.**







# Travelling for Thrills

Shopping for the best bargains around the world may be a top reason for travelling. But shopping around for adventure and new experiences abroad is fast becoming the dream of many youths, as TAY YU YAN discovers

The doors open and you look out, but all you can see is the endless blue sky. Your heart's racing faster than the wind whipping at your face as adrenaline pumps through your veins. The voice behind you says to get ready and your stomach drops 14,000 ft below – even before you do. When you hear the words “on the count of three,” you take a deep breath as if it is your last. One...two...three. You jump, letting the wind guide you back home.

Skydiving and waterfall abseiling are some activities that you can never experience here. The only way to experience it is to travel beyond Singapore.

Alyson Oliver, 34, Regional Sales Manager SEA of Start the Adventure

(STA) Travel said: “Travelling (for thrill) opens your whole world to so many different experiences, so I think it's a really important thing to do as a young person.”

HYPE susses out outdoor adventures for the adrenaline junkie in descending order of thrill factor.

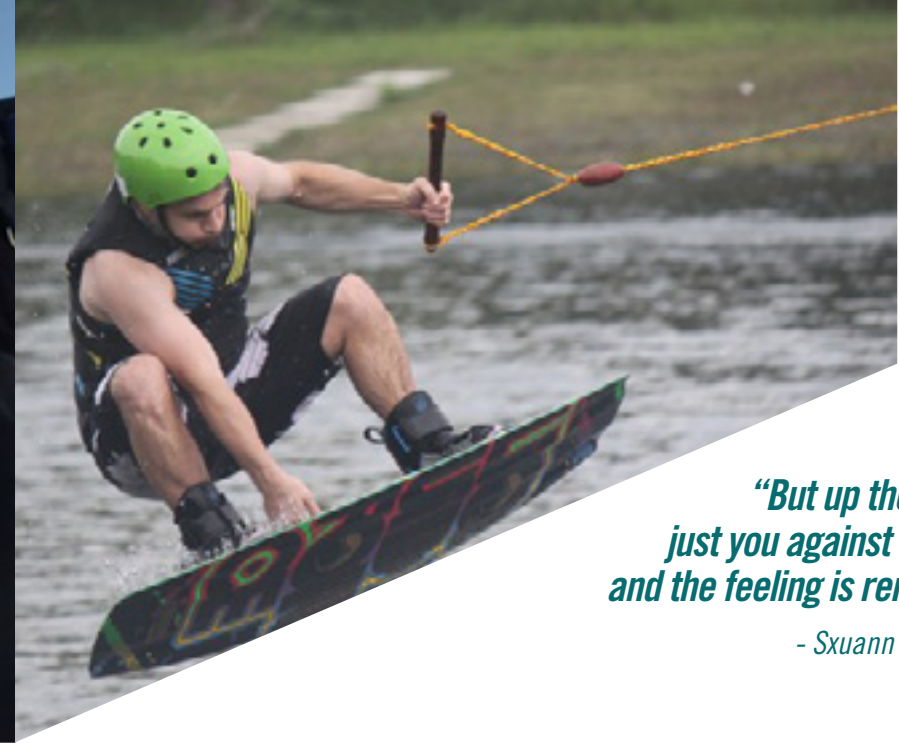
**Thrill Level:** ★★★★★

**Tandem Skydiving in Sydney, Australia**  
If you're looking for fresh scenery and a serious test of guts, tandem skydiving is the way to go. Wearing a safety harness, you'll be physically attached to a professional skydiver and jump off a plane, freefalling through the air! You don't have to have any prior experience because basic training will be given before the activity takes place.

*“I was scared, but I felt a sense of achievement when I completed it.”*  
- Chrislyn Koh

Melody Tay, 20, a student at Yale-National University of Singapore (NUS) College, said: “As you grow older, you get scared more easily. So I'm trying to keep that bravery and the ability to take risks (by challenging myself).” For someone who has experienced skydiving, Xuann Sim, 19, a student from Ngee Ann Polytechnic, said: “Of course (I was) afraid, and the scariest part is when I jumped thinking ‘oh, why did I’. But up there, it's just you against the world, and the feeling is remarkable.”

Summer is the best time to go skydiving. STA travels offers a Tandem Skydiving pass in Sydney



*“But up there it's just you against the world, and the feeling is remarkable.”*  
- Xuann Sim



from SGD\$340, which is valid for 12 months from the date of purchase. “You can also purchase the package once you arrive in Australia at the same price. Booking it before just means that you are committed to doing it,” said Ms Oliver. Find out more at statravel.com.sg.

**Thrill Level:** ★★★★★

**Cage Diving with Sharks in Cape Town, South Africa**  
Known as the Mother City, Cape Town is home to about 40 different shark species. There's no better place to experience coming face-to-face with the ocean's most fearsome creature. You'll be completely submerged in the ocean, protected by a steel cage with gaps small enough that the sharks won't bite. But if you're having second doubts, you can get out of it as the cage will be connected to the boat.

Shark Cage Diving offers this exciting experience at SGD\$147.20 per pax. The Great White sharks are there all year round, but the best season is between March to September as the waters are clearer. The brave may not live forever, but the cautious don't live at all! Find out more at sharkcagediving.net.

**Thrill Level:** ★★★★★

**Waterfall Abseiling in Perak, Malaysia**  
If you think you're not game enough for tandem skydiving, start out with abseiling a waterfall in Gopeng town!

This isn't as easy as it sounds with water gushing at you from the top while you descend.

“It was so slippery (that) my friend lost his footing and slammed into the waterfall,” shared Chrislyn Koh, 20, a student from Ngee Ann Polytechnic. “I was scared, but I felt a sense of achievement when I conquered it,” she added.

Riverbug Asia has a half day Waterfall Abseiling programme that starts from Gopeng town in Perak, Malaysia. You'll be able to scale down the beautiful Ulu Geruntum Waterfall for just SGD\$35. Find out more at riverbug.asia.

**Thrill Level:** ★★

**Cable-Skiing in Batam, Indonesia**  
If you can't take heights, go for speed! Experience water-skiing in Batam – except that you don't get pulled by a boat, but by a cable at about 28 km/h. This sport requires more than just balance and skill.

Emmeline Khoo, 27, a Subcontracts Officer at Keppel Shipyard Ltd who has tried cable-skiing, advised: “Make sure your body is in good condition because it takes a lot of energy to maintain that certain position to cable-ski.” Ms Khoo explained that she had done the activity while suffering from muscle aches, which deterred her from playing the water sport at her full potential, and also resulted in multiple falls.

Sure, you can cable-ski in Singapore too, but the Batam Cable-Ski Park

offers a full day ski pass package inclusive of a two-way ferry for SGD\$108. This includes equipment, coaching, and lunch! Find out more at cable-ski.com.

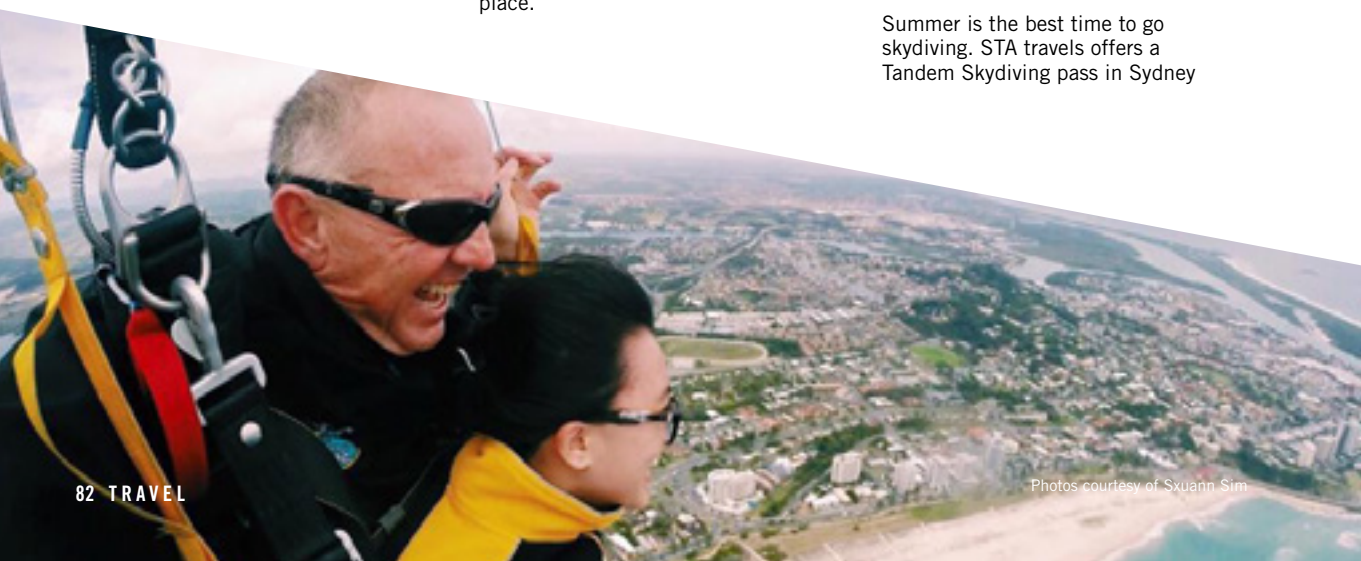
**Thrill Level:** ★

**Eating Balut anywhere and everywhere in the Philippines**  
You may enjoy your half-boiled egg with kaya toast, but *balut* is manna only for the ardent foodie. The Filipino delicacy is a boiled duck egg with a foetus that is still in its developing stages. The older the fertilised egg, the more developed it is, and the greater the challenge of swallowing it. The egg is usually cracked open with a spoon, and the fluid will be consumed first and then the yolk, after dipping it in salt to enhance the flavour.

Even Dianne Castillo, 25, a Filipino, dares not try the *balut* in its more mature stages where the whole head, beak, and body of the duck are fully formed and distinguishable. “The one I had was only a few days old so it wasn't challenging...I'll probably eat it again, but not the more developed ones,” mused Ms Castillo.

Sold on the streets for 15 pesos (about SGD\$0.50), this exotic dish is worth a try for jaded palates.

“It's a whole new world out there, and if you don't open up your horizons, you are going to miss out a lot on life,” said Daniel Yuen, 25, a graduate from NUS who is a frequent and passionate traveller.





# WIRED

# BLURRING BOUNDARY BETWEEN REAL AND VIRTUAL

TEO ZI LIN goes on a quest to unravel the boons and banes of augmented reality games

***“I believe that augmented reality will be the biggest technological revolution that happens in our lifetimes.”***

- Tim Sweeney  
Founder of Epic Games

Beware, gamers. If you think virtual reality is the next big bang, a bigger and more disruptive technology is coming your way – Augmented Reality (AR).

According to Tech Times, AR is the blending of the virtual world and reality, where developers create contents within applications that blend in with the real world. This allows players to interact with virtual contents in the real world. Imagine playing your favourite game in the real physical environment you are in, turning your bedroom into your venerated battlefield.

According to a report by VentureBeat, the leading source for news and perspective on tech innovation, during the ChinaJoy China Game Developers Conference 2015 in Shanghai, Epic Games' esteemed founder, Tim Sweeney, said: “I believe that augmented reality will be the biggest technological revolution that happens in our lifetimes.”

In a survey conducted by HYPE among 100 youths, 73 per cent of them said that they would try an AR game. “Bringing a game onto a more realistic platform is always an enticing idea,” says Tan Zheng Yang, 19, an avid fan of the TERA online game. However, there are other respondents, like Syakurah Saif and Adam Lee, both 19, who prefer to keep their games completely virtual as they “like the comfort of playing at home”.

Mr Ivan Moltini, manager of Public Relations and Communications for

Daylight Studios, a Singapore-based game development studio, predicts that when AR advances, “Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas, like League of Legends and Dota 2, [would] be the most popular here in Singapore.”

“For one, probably 70 per cent of the people who head down to their local LAN shop are playing either of the games. Secondly, imagine taking Summoner's Rift from League of Legends and placing it on your table-top; it would become a refreshing way to play the game and would attract a lot of people, young and old.”

Here comes the golden question. How will AR games impact our youths? Will there be a rise in game addiction? What are some of the social and physical consequences?

Critics believe that AR games help gamers to be more discerning, as they do not completely take the players out of the real world. However, youths surveyed had mixed opinions. About 47 per cent supported the critics' belief.

“I feel that while players will understand the difference between what's real and virtual, it's still up to individuals' mindset, control and choice, which may make them undiscerning if AR games are well-created,” says Chew Tai Wen, 20, a gamer who is currently pursuing a diploma in Psychology Studies at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Mr Eugene Chong, 35, director of Seeding Minds and counselling

psychologist who specialises in psychiatric conditions, youth behaviours and couples counselling, raised caution about the high tendency of being addicted to AR games. As AR games are readily accessible, “the individual will let down their guard and constantly be immersed in this semi-state of gaming, which is similar to the concept of hypnosis,” says Mr Chong.

“The key idea is that once a person gets into a kairotic moment, they enter the state of semi-consciousness. The conscious part of them is lower and dopamine effects become real.”

This is a cause for concern as AR games are physical. AR games, like Ingress by Google, require the player to move around physically while playing the game. Players who are too engrossed in the game and are oblivious to their surroundings may meet uncalled physical harm, such as banging into poles or even running into a car accident.

According to Mr Chong, AR games hinder the process of communication too. “With additional elements in the AR environment, it will cause overload to the individuals when communicating. It is especially difficult nowadays for people to stay

focused in conversation and release their mobile devices from their presence,” he explains.

Despite all these possible negative impacts, AR games do have a positive side as well.

For one, Mr Chong and youths both believe that interactive AR games help gamers to forge friendships with like-minded players in real life, expanding their social circle. “This will increase communication, especially to those who may not be so socially capable. In some ways, it allows the brain to manage both reality and virtual world concurrently. It is in a way, positive training for the brain,” says Mr Chong.

AR games also help to promote a healthier lifestyle by encouraging physical exercise. This beats sitting in front of the computer and playing games on screen for hours, which can be damaging to both your health and eyesight.

While it seems that AR games are potentially harmful to gamers, fret not. Mr Chong says that by limiting gameplay and playing cautiously, the banes can be minimised, or even avoided. So, gamers, what are you waiting for? Get moving!

Pokémon GO is an upcoming augmented reality game that allows players to discover Pokémon in the real world. An accessory called Pokémon GO Plus will be released with the game. It is a small wearable wristband developed by Nintendo, which uses a Bluetooth connection to notify users when a wild Pokémon is nearby. Pokémon GO allows players to catch, battle, train and trade Pokémon that appear throughout the real world. It will be released sometime this year for iOS and Android devices. Gotta Catch 'Em All!

***“I feel that while players will understand the difference between what's real and virtual, it's still up to individuals' mindset, control and choice, which may make them undiscerning if AR games are well-created.”***

- Chew Tai Wen

***“The individual will let down their guard and constantly be immersed in this semi-state of gaming, which is similar to the concept of hypnosis.”***

- Mr Eugene Chong  
Director of Seeding Minds and  
Counselling Psychologist



## PART-TIME STUDIES, NEW PROSPECTS



**"THIS COURSE PROVIDES ME WITH HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE BY WORKING DIRECTLY WITH INDUSTRY STANDARD NETWORKING DEVICES THAT INTERCONNECT COMPUTER DEVICE."**

**Mr Ibrahim Ali**  
A student from  
Northumbria University (UK)  
BSc (Hons) Computer and Network  
Technology programme at MDIS

### Real-world education gives young professionals like Ibrahim Ali an edge over their peers

When associate engineer Ibrahim Ali decided to go back to school and further his education, he wanted a course of study that offered a real-world approach to learning.

The 27-year-old has been working in the telecommunications industry for the past five years and is currently doing a Bachelor of Science (Honours) Computer and Network Technology programme at the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS).

Founded in 1956, MDIS is Singapore's oldest not-for-profit professional institute for lifelong learning.

"What attracts me to this course is that it offers me a practical-learning approach over a theory-based approach," says Mr Ibrahim, who has a keen interest in computer networking, software development, building and managing information technology (IT) infrastructure within various operating systems.

The part-time programme he is studying for is awarded by Northumbria University in Britain. The programmes in Britain are accredited by the British Computer Society. Students have the option of taking the Cisco Certified Network Associate examination upon completion of the course.

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### Working with industry

For Mr Ibrahim, choosing a course of study that meets his needs and interests was an important first step and he was careful to compare all available programmes in the market.

He picked the MDIS programme because it relates closely to his field of work and promises to impart real-world knowledge.

"It allows me to learn all types of modern enterprise computer systems used today to provide critical IT support for many businesses," says Mr Ibrahim.

"Other similar IT courses tend to have a very deep focus on mostly the technical aspects of IT. Although this is good, it steers away from the real-world applications of the technologies in the IT industry," he adds.

Also, this course allows him to hone skills that go beyond network computing, such as project management and business.

### Programmes from Northumbria University (UK)

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BSc (Hons) Computer Security



SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE  
(cybersecurity.mdis.edu.sg)

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# DRONES SET TO SOAR

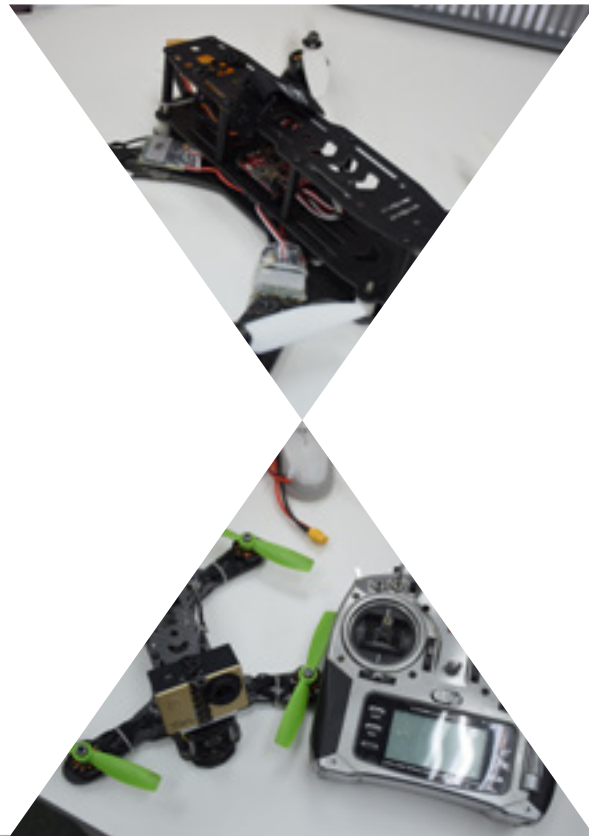
Roam the skies with TAN JIN HENG as he zooms in on the latest hobby in town

Drones are becoming immensely popular in Singapore for the benefits that they are able provide to many – from the thrill of flying to using them for photography or rescue operations.

“You fly something as though you are flying, it’s attractive, people like it, you feel a sense of speed when these things go at 100 km/h, it’s like why people like Formula 1. It’s the thrill. It’s is the feeling of freedom,” said Zhuo Hua, 27, Manager of Drone Matters, a company that focuses on selling parts of racing drones and aerial photography.

“For aerial videos or photography, drones bring a whole new perspective. For racing, it’s popular among those who like speed. Either way, both give a good adrenaline rush,” said enthusiast Richard Oking, 33, an administrator of drone hobby group Universal Drones Singapore.

Mr Zhuo said that flying drones as a hobby in the Asian Pacific region is becoming increasingly popular, where



racing contests are held constantly with some prizes even going up to a million dollars.

In racing, quadcopters are used. Quadcopters are multi-rotor copters with four arms, a motor and propeller at each end of its arm. They are small, light and agile and if they crash, a change of the damaged propellers would suffice and they can start to fly and race again.

Mr Ronald Yong, a senior manager of Singapore Hobbies Supplies Pte Ltd, introduces two drones: Phantom 3 Professional Drone and the Inspire 1 by a company named DJI, which manufactures recreational and commercial aerial vehicles for aerial photography and videography.

The Phantom 3 has four propellers at each of its four arms, weighs 1.2kg and has an array of features. It has GPS-assisted hover, which allows the drone to hover at a particular position more precisely and accurately by locking onto satellites. This makes it completely aware of its position and its relation to the user who can track it more easily. In addition, it has a vision positioning system, which allows it to process information from every sensor and perform complex calculations in real time.

This helps it to hover in place more precisely and fly indoors or in other environments. It then automatically logs and remembers the details of every flight it takes, and is attached with a camera that can record videos up to a distance of four km and shoot 12 megapixel photographs.

The Inspire 1 has nearly similar properties with the Phantom 3 but it weighs heavier at 2.935kg, and is larger in size



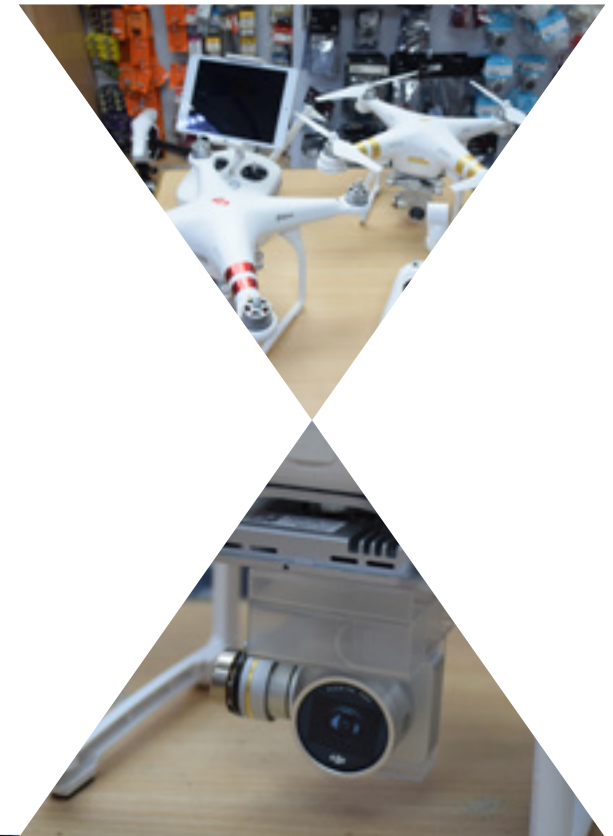
because of the large carbon fibre arms and legs and blades, more powerful motors and the 360-degree rotational camera. The camera allows the user to shoot with an sweeping unobstructed view and gives the user the freedom to photograph shots independent of the direction that the drone is flying.

On top of that, it is equipped with the “FailSafe” technology whereby in the event when the battery runs low or connection with the remote controller is lost, the Inspire 1 uses its positioning system and smart flight technology to return to the user. Both are controlled with the help of a mobile device.

“Holidaymakers are using the Phantoms for taking footage from above that you would not normally be able to take with the traditional cameras,” said Mr Yong.

Drones are being tested in the commercial arena as well. International companies are experimenting with drones to make deliveries. Companies like Amazon and Google are planning to use airborne drones to deliver parcels to customers’ doorsteps. Deliveries without a postman may become a reality in the future of Singapore, as Singapore Post made a trial mail run on October 2015 using an unmanned aerial vehicle from mainland Singapore to Pulau Ubin in a 2-km test flight that carried a T-shirt and a packet.

The rise of new technologies in drones will transform the way photographs are being shot. New drones utilise the “follow-me” technology, which enables a person, who is doing sports, to film himself from an aerial perspective with the drone following the person.



Nevertheless, the technology is still in its infancy. Existing drones do not have obstacle avoidance, hence if the person is running through rows of trees, the drones are unable to detect the trees and will crash into them.

However, GPS technology allows drones to lock onto a position and hover at the same place with the help of satellite signals, without the need for controls. Users can wear goggles to experience the first-person view of drones in flight through the view of the drones’ mounted camera, immersing themselves in the thrill of flying.

While recreational drones can be fun, Mr Zhuo Hua advises users to follow the rules and regulations of CAAS (Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore) which governs the flying of recreational and commercial drones.

Mr Richard Oking added, “Follow the CAAS rules, use common sense and have fun.”

***“For aerial videos or photography, drones bring a whole new perspective. For racing, it’s popular among those who like speed. Either way, both give a good adrenaline rush.”***

*- Richard Oking*





TEO ZILIN

# ARE YOU REAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

The advent of social media has taken the world by storm. According to We Are Social, there are five million active social media users in Singapore, which is a penetration rate of 91 per cent. In a society where online presence has become essential in promoting brands and building consumer relations, individuals have also resorted to building their online presence to expand their social networks and connections.

How we present ourselves on social media is largely associated with our perceptions of ourselves. This perception consists of two personality domains – our true self and ideal self. Study.com defines our true self as who we actually are, and our ideal self is an idealised image of who we wish to be.

Research by study.com has shown that the lack of alignment between our true self and ideal self can result in mental distress or anxiety. Similarly, if the way you are is aligned with the way you want to be, your mind will feel at peace. In order to minimise the level of incongruence between their ideal and true selves, people tend to resort to one of the easiest ways to make this possible – portraying themselves in their ideal self in the virtual world.

It is human nature to want to look good, even on social media. According to World Well-Being Project, users on dating sites like OKCupid inflate their height by two inches and their income by 20 per cent. They also upload attractive photos of themselves, even if the photos are sometimes out of date.

As the use of social media evolves and people become more competitive, the

desire to portray our ideal instead of true self is becoming more prevalent on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and even LinkedIn.

How many of you are guilty of being a sucker for followers and likes on social media? How many of you are guilty of spending 10 minutes (or more) to style and take a hipster 'Instagram-worthy' food photo? How many of you are guilty of spending time and effort to find the ideal location and poses that make for a perfect #OOTD (Outfit Of The Day) shot?

Well, the good news is that you are not the only one. However, some people who have taken it too far have had enough of social media.

Essena O'Neill, an ex-Instagram star with more than 800,000 followers, surprised her fans by speaking out against social media after she realised that her social media accounts were false and inaccurate representations of her true self. She even renamed her Instagram account "Social Media Is Not Real Life".

Essena replaced many of her Instagram photos with honest captions to reveal the amount of effort and time spent on creating what seemed like spontaneous moments. She also spoke of how she really felt while taking the pictures and how little she would eat in order to get her figure.

In a video posted on Essena's Vimeo account, she said, "I want you to know that I used to be obsessed with being followed or being liked. I was obsessed with people liking me. Nothing's wrong with that. That's beautiful. Everyone

***"How we present ourselves on social media is largely associated with our perceptions of ourselves. This perception consists of two personality domains – our true self and ideal self."***

wants to feel valued and loved. But on social media as it currently stands, a number will never give you that feeling.

People who aspire to be popular in their ideal self can relate to Essena, equating the number of likes and followers to popularity. Feelings of inadequacy and insecurity can overwhelm these people as they compare the amount of likes and followers they have to others that they follow.

However, numbers are just figures. They can even be bought. The question is: Are you really presenting your true self or a hyper-idealistic self?

Don't let numbers and an online persona that you created overwrite your real self. Instead, make your real self align with your ideal self. In the process, you will tread the path to self-actualisation, becoming the best, and most importantly, the real you.



RIZQINA MAHDZAR

# HUMAN INTERACTION DECLINES AS SMARTPHONES RISE

When I first arrived in Phnom Penh in March last year, I was slapped with a whole new reality and environment. I marvelled at how people rarely used their smartphones. Everybody talked to anybody. Dinner conversations were often full with laughter, and hanging out with friends meant that you'd actually get to interact with one another face-to-face.

I soon followed suit, ditching the \$220 iPhone 4S that I had brought along, letting it collect dust at the bottom of my drawer. When I came back to Singapore seven months later, phoneless, beaming with energy and over-friendliness, I sat in the bus, tugging at my luggage, and greeting everyone I saw with a smile.

Nobody smiled back. They couldn't have, for everyone was too busy staring at the little rectangles in their palms, with the flashes of white light against their faces.

Soon after, I found myself slowly conforming back to living in the digital world, scrolling endlessly on my phone, at home, in the bus, on the train, at school, and so on. It was difficult not to go online when practically everybody did, and in order to keep up with the latest happenings, I had to.

According to We Are Social's Digital, Social, and Mobile report in 2015, Singapore has seen a 12 per cent rise in the number of active Internet users since January 2014, amounting to 4.45 million users. There are 3.54 million people accessing the Internet via their phones, spending an average of 2 hours and 18 minutes a day. Most people are spending their time on

***"Nobody smiled back. They couldn't have, for everybody was too busy staring at the little rectangles in their palms, with the flashes of white light against their faces."***

social apps, with the most active social platform being Whatsapp.

Sure, smartphones do help to connect us to our loved ones, catch up with the latest news, guide us to our destinations, and so on.

But smartphones are not the problem. We are. Our over-reliance on technology has made it difficult for us to put down our phones and embrace real life interaction. We are so immersed in this culture of living online that our attention is often divided unequally between the real world and the digital sphere.

According to a 2015 study by Pew Research Center, 89 per cent of smartphone owners admitted that they had used their phones at the last social gathering that they went to. However, 82 per cent of these respondents also felt that using their phones in social settings actually hurt the conversations they had.

In Cambodia itself, the number of active Internet users has risen 414 per

cent since January 2014, taking the top spot in the growth of active Internet users among countries in the Asia Pacific. With over 3.8 million active users on the net, mobile phones hold the highest share of web traffic at 47 per cent. Mobile devices attract 98.67 per cent of Internet subscriptions.

Even though Cambodia has seen a huge growth in their digital sphere, the phenomenon of being addicted to smartphones can be seen so evidently in Singapore, but surprisingly, not so in Phnom Penh. The pressure and pace of life in Singapore have pushed people to conduct their businesses and social lives online for sheer convenience.

Our lives are seen through the photographs we post on Instagram, or our status updates on Facebook. Deciding on whom to date has been reduced to the mere form of swipes based on a person's ability to highlight their physical features through carefully selected photos, coupled with a few lines to describe themselves.

But technology is not a bad thing; and we shouldn't berate its advancement simply because we have become over-reliant on it. If you're on the train and someone is sitting beside you, strike up a conversation with that person. Leave your phone alone at the dinner table, and start talking with your family and friends. Technology will remain long after we are gone, but the people surrounding us will not.

Let us live in the moment, and not in our phones.





ELIZABETH GOH

# VIGILANTISM IN A DIGITAL AGE

When you think of the word ‘vigilante’, perhaps a caped crusader would come to mind. A hero all decked out in a mask and quiver, wielding his bow to stop the city’s worst murderers (read: Arrow’s Oliver Queen). Visualise a man who hits the streets under the cover of darkness and anonymity to defeat the evildoers populating the country.

But in this technological age, modern vigilantism sits behind a computer screen. It seeks out those who have caused public harm, and shames them online through a barrage of insults aimed at their family and friends on their social media platforms, emails or any other online outlet.

Private information of the perpetrator can even be dug up from the Internet and revealed online to the angry masses. This practice is commonly known as doxxing, whereby intimate details about an individual, from his home address, to his family members and handphone number are uploaded onto the web to expose him to public shame.

Singapore is no stranger to digital vigilantism. In 2014, Briton expatriate Anton Casey posted a photo of his son riding the MRT on his Facebook page with the caption: “Daddy, where is your car and who are all these poor people?”, followed with another picture of said son sitting in a Porsche, captioned: “Ahhhh reunited with my baby. Normal service can resume, once I have washed the stench of public transport off me.”

Naturally, these offensive and insensitive remarks spread quickly around the Internet, and not only Casey, but also his wife and child

received death threats and hateful comments from the online lynch mob. The situation worsened to the point that Casey and his family soon left the country permanently.

We also have Jover Chew, who cheated a tourist, Mr Pham Van Thoai, of his money at his shop at Sim Lim Square. At one end of the spectrum, the Internet was used to raise awareness about raising money to compensate the victim, and at the other end, SMRT (Ltd) Feedback (a local vigilante organisation unaffiliated to SMRT) released Chew’s IC number, mobile number and topless photos he’d taken of himself to fuel the public’s growing hatred.

With our society’s connectedness, the spread of information online becomes so much easier, as does the spread of hate. According to the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), in 2014, 88 per cent of households in Singapore had Internet access. A 2014 report by We Are Social showed that our citizens have one of the highest rates of social media consumption worldwide, the second highest social penetration across the globe standing at 59 per cent.

So when does digital vigilantism cross the line from helping the hurt to harming beyond repair? Are there any boundaries that are stepped over too far in the everyday person’s pursuit of justice? Perhaps when Casey’s five-year-old son’s appearance was mocked, and he was called “retarded, (with) slitty eyes, awful mouth and teeth” or when netizens threatened to kill his entire family. Perhaps in 2014, when

***“It is impossible to have a moderator online policing the punishment meted out to wrongdoers.”***

STOMP condemned an NS man for not giving up his seat for an elderly lady, when in fact, the photo taken cropped out an empty reserved seat on the same row.

It is impossible to have a moderator online policing the punishment meted out to wrongdoers. In the virtual universe, things develop at the speed of light. It only takes seconds for thousands to send out death threats and insults, to condemn another and take punishment as our own responsibility. But there are no self-regulating measures in place to ensure that a simple chiding does not spiral into death threats, or bashing of the individual’s innocent family and friends. Admittedly, taking immediate revenge can be satisfying, but these hate pursuits constitute cyber bullying, and in doing that, we become the bullies we so detest.

Of course there are positives, like the whopping sum of \$12,000 raised by caring individuals all over the country for Mr Pham. And this is what we should focus on – helping and building up those in need instead of tearing others down. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”



LEONARD TAN

# DIALOGUES IN DIE-LECTS

As we focused so much on English and Mandarin during our growing up years, many of us may have forgotten our dialect – the root of our identity.

I had the privilege of learning my dialect, Teochew, since young, as all my grandparents did not know how to speak English or Mandarin. I was also fortunate that all my grandparents were Teochew – I spoke this on a daily basis.

As I grew up, I realised why speaking my dialect is so important to me. Speaking dialect has given me a sense of familiarity with my fellow other dialect speakers and more importantly, a deepened relationship with my dialect-speaking relatives.

Dialects are like Singlish – it’s special to Singaporeans. Dialects in this case, are unique to the different groups of Chinese in Singapore and one would strike a chord with his or her dialect counterpart anywhere. If you’re Cantonese, going to Hongkong would be like a second home; if you’re Hokkien, maybe Taiwan, and for the Teochews, maybe Thailand.

Speaking dialect is the identity that has been slowly erased throughout the years in Singapore like a general wash on people, leaving us only fluent in English and our mother tongue.

“Identity” has become a hot topic for Singaporeans as we open our doors to foreigners. Most people know how to speak English, and for those from Asian countries, they would know how to speak Mandarin or one of the

***“Speaking dialect has given me a sense of familiarity with my fellow other dialect speakers and more importantly, a deepened relationship with my dialect-speaking relatives.”***

official languages. With our knowledge of English and the mother tongue, communicating with them is not much of an issue.

Therefore, if we’re looking to retaining our uniqueness, we should perhaps start learning our dialects. For those who worry that this will be a dividing factor between our people, we only need to look at the older generation who are exposed to various dialects and are fluent in many. In fact, speaking one another’s dialects could be a unifying factor instead.

Speaking dialect is also a part of our history. As much as we learn about History in primary and secondary school, isn’t learning and practising our dialects, our history? Learning history should start at home, with our family, and a good way to learn is to use our dialect.

The *Goh Report* in 1978, an evaluation of Singapore’s education system by Dr. Goh Keng Swee, showed that less than 40 per cent of the student population managed to achieve the minimum level of competency in two languages. The government attributed the poor mastery of Mandarin among the

Singaporean Chinese to the use of dialects (mainly Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese and Hakka).

Being affably known as the “campaign country”, Singapore launched the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979 and Speak Good English Movement in 2000. The former aimed at encouraging the Chinese to speak a common language – Mandarin – and all Singaporeans to speak English so they could interact with the rest of the world.

But studies have also found that children are capable of learning multiple languages when they are young. According to Michael Paradis, a neurolinguist at McGill University in Montreal, children can pick up various accents during their growing up years. During their adulthood, these languages will not interfere with other parts of the brain.

So, let’s go back to our roots and speak our “mother tongue” as I call it, because my mother and grandmothers learnt their Teochew before Mandarin. Dialects, like any other language, should never become part of the contents of history books.





MEGAN TAN

# LOOK YOURSELF IN THE MIRROR

Two days ago, I was getting my lunch fix at a coffee shop. I vividly recall eating a humble plate of economical beehoon served with a ladleful of chicken curry.

“Megs!” A familiar exclamation boomed across the compound.

It was Chell, the best friend I grew up with since we were nine.

Before I could even utter a word of greeting, Chell, in her excited and bubbly self, giggled and whispered to me: “Are you having curry? Your teeth look kind of yellow today.”

While I was not the least offended by that statement, I guess it did prove that our outer appearance does matter – a lot. Like it or not, judging a book by its cover is part and parcel of being human. The way we present ourselves, our grooming habits and even natural genetics can apparently affect social standing and the amount on our pay cheques.

Recently, I read an article titled “7 Ways Your Look Affects Your Pay” by Aaron Gouveia. The article named seven factors of human aesthetics that affect a person’s salary. These reasons include obesity, height comparisons and attractiveness in general. What is more important to me, however, wasn’t the list that helps you get higher pay. Rather, it was the actual studies and research in that article that proved looks *do* matter.

*“In a good and perfect world, I would have loved to advocate a non-discriminatory environment where people could dress and look however they please. Unfortunately, this is not a good and perfect world.”*

Whether it’s your potential employer or the next potential dating candidate, people form impressions easily, and quickly too, for that matter.

“I don’t live to please anyone!” Countless statements along the lines of these I’ve heard. But to pay close attention to our appearance and the way we carry ourselves does not make us people-pleasers in any way. Instead, we could well be doing ourselves a big favour. The way I see it, I would love to phrase it as “giving yourself a chance to give a good and proper introduction before you wreck anything with your words.”

One of my closest confidantes once reasoned with me that being natural is beautiful. “Cosmetic products are

merely a bunch of needless supplies used to create a mask of who you truly are,” she scoffed.

I kept silent, gave her statement some thought and returned a sheepish smile.

“If that’s the case, whoever said that ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ would most likely be scorning at your remark,” I joked.

Yet in all seriousness to prove my point, a study funded by Procter & Gamble, Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston University, and the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute did reveal that women who wear make-up tend to rank higher in terms of competence and trustworthiness.

In a good and perfect world, I would have loved to advocate a non-discriminatory environment where people could dress and look however they please. Unfortunately, this is not a good and perfect world.

We cannot deny; just as we go about scrutinising others, we are also constant subjects of scrutiny. Sometimes this isn’t all about an issue of superficiality – it’s about the hardwired instinct inside the human brain, the very same ability that causes the snappy judgments when a tiger is about to devour you.



SARAH RACHEL TEO

# VOLUNTEERING FOR CASH?

*Volunteer: A person who voluntarily offers himself or herself for a service or undertaking; a person who performs a service willingly and without pay.*

Often, volunteers spend their time, effort and money to help the unfortunate in the hope that the people they help will benefit. The Government is indeed encouraging the spirit of volunteerism by giving all civil servants a day off to volunteer at charities and more companies are being involved in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes to serve the community at large.

Being a volunteer also has many benefits for students: a higher chance of getting a tertiary education, a nicer resume, and oh yes! – Cash.

It was recently announced that Singapore’s sovereign wealth fund, the Government Investment Corporation of Singapore, or GIC Pte Ltd, is giving cash grants for students who volunteer for a minimum of 25 hours.

The grant, called “GIC Sparks & Smiles”, is open to students in universities, polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education in Singapore, offering \$3,000 to \$5,000 for each student. With \$2 million set aside for this grant, it hopes to attract 200 students in the next four years.

Though this grant is only open to those from households with an income of below \$2,000, what is it encouraging? Students will feel more attracted to the cash reward, rather than giving their all to help the community.

Rewarding volunteers, especially full-time volunteers, has been highly debated. Should we give them food and travel allowance? Volunteer benefits? After all, they do spend a lot of effort to help the less fortunate. Hence, to some organisations, a reward is some form of gratitude to make their volunteers feel appreciated.

However, I feel that helping out as a volunteer already has its intangible benefits that do not necessarily lead to something on paper.

According to SG Cares, now merged with SG Gives to form giving.sg, benefits include “volunteer satisfaction”, “gaining knowledge and skills”, and being “appreciated and nurtured” by the organisation.

Coming from a volunteer-based Co-Curricular Activity (CCA) back in secondary school, I noticed a lot of my schoolmates’ reflections after being involved in volunteer work. They “gained experiences” and felt that the people they were helping “taught me more than what I could teach them”.

*“The intangible benefits are reward enough in themselves and make us want to volunteer again.”*

Dr Soh Jian Yi, Touch Family Services volunteer and consultant at National University Hospital, said in an article for The Straits Times: “What I had gained from helping was worth far more than the money I could have obtained from spending that same time working.”

Through helping out at Touch, she was able to observe children and understand their nuances, which helped her as a paediatrician.

The intangible benefits are rewarding enough in themselves and make us want to volunteer again. Attaching a physical and monetary worth to such an experience will not only decrease its value, but also question the real purpose for volunteering.

Ultimately, volunteering should not be done with the intent to receive a reward of any kind, but to give back to the community with one’s skills and talents. With the grant in mind, students applying for it should not focus on going after the cash reward attached to 25 hours of volunteer work. Volunteerism should still be the willingness to do something for the good of others.

In return for the work done for charitable services, we may not receive a physical reward. Instead, we receive lessons learnt, values and experiences, which do not come with a price tag. They are priceless.





TAN HUI RONG

# WASTE NOT... REGRET NOT

Just last year, in a poll conducted by Zero Waste SG, a non-profit organisation dedicated to help Singapore eradicate wastage, it was found that nine in 10 Singaporeans are concerned about the amount of food wasted.

The respondents in the polls voiced several concerns regarding how Food & Beverages (F&B) companies are throwing out perfectly edible food. They felt that the F&B companies should do more to help the wastage situation by donating or reducing the price of unsold and near-expiry goods.

It would appear that Singaporeans genuinely do want to resolve this serious ill that has afflicted our society.

Yet, astonishingly, in a survey commissioned jointly by National Environment Agency (NEA) and Ari-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) late last year it was found that although Singaporeans are generally aware of the amount of food they would waste in doing so, they took no initiative to resolve the issue.

Singaporeans seem to be wrestling between the bona fide desire to reduce wastage and their *kiasu* tendencies. After all, one in four Singaporeans buys more food than needed for fear of not having enough to eat, and in a 2015 survey commissioned by Electrolux, a household appliance company, it was found that 68 per cent of Singaporeans have the tendency to prepare excessive food.

Just in 2014 alone, 788,600 tonnes of consumable food – roughly the

weight of a fully loaded Airbus A380 – was thrown away. In fact, supermarket giant, Fairprice foods, constituted only 0.3 per cent of the total food wasted, roughly 88 garbage trucks. In comparison, an average Singaporean had thrown away 29 packs of rice, roughly two bowls of rice per day.

In an attempt to reduce food wastage, Fairprice has started food donation programmes with voluntary welfare groups such as Food from the Heart. Fairprice has also reduced prices of fruits and vegetables that have blemishes.

McDonalds had collected its used cooking oil and sold it to recycling companies to be made into soap and biodiesel. NEA came up with a new campaign by comparing the cost of food wastage and how that money could otherwise be spent.

Can we blame supermarkets when we do not want to buy perishable and edible goods because of a slight blemish or two? Can we blame the people who run food stalls for the leftovers we couldn't or wouldn't finish? Can we blame NEA for not trying harder to change the mindset of wastefulness among Singaporeans?

Perhaps the baton has always been in our hands. Instead of pushing the blame of food wastage to F&B companies and relying on governmental organisations to come up with campaigns to encourage individual to reduce food waste, we should take matters into our own hands.

*“Just in 2014 alone, 788,600 tonnes of consumable food – roughly the weight of a fully loaded Airbus A380 – were thrown away.”*

As a start, you could do the following:

1. **Ask for less:** If you know you can't eat much because of a heavy meal you had before, ask for less. This is better than leaving uneaten food on your plate.
2. **Carry a container:** If you can't finish the plate of food, you can always pack some away for later. Bringing your own container and not using disposable packaging also means saving the environment and your money.
3. **Blemishes do not hurt:** Slight dents on a fruit won't kill you. If you are bothered by it, you can always cut that tiny part away. Don't create blemishes by pressing every fruit or vegetable packet.
4. **Buffets don't run away:** Go back for round two, three or even 10 in a buffet. Instead of piling your plate with food, take just a little of everything you want to try and if you want some more, go back for seconds.

It is through little actions on our part that we can help minimise food wastage.



TAY YU YAN

# REASON WHY YOU'RE SINGLE

*“Their ideal type of boyfriend or girlfriend has to fit a whole long list of criteria that include appearance, talent and character. Who set the bar and who are you benchmarked against?”*

The problem with most singles today is that they have impossibly high expectations of their non-existent other half. The men have to be tall and reasonably good-looking if not suave; intelligent, but not geeky. A talent for singing would be a plus point, and better, if he drives a car or two. On the other hand, the women have to be slim and slender; attractive yet innocent; kind and soft-spoken. A talent for homemaking would be a great, but if she's a part-time model, bonus!

Their ideal type of boyfriend or girlfriend has to fit a whole long list of criteria that include appearance, talent and character. Who set the bar and who are you benchmarked against? It's the characters who exist only in fiction, particularly in melodrama. It doesn't matter if he or she is a Korean, Taiwanese, Japanese or Hongkonger; nationality doesn't matter here. Deal with it – you lost to that pretty face whose fair skin shines brighter than your teeth on screen. It's nearly impossible to avoid being compared to characters like those depicted in the dramas because after all, they're made to be perfect.

Take Do Min-Joon for example, the sexy male lead in the Korean drama serial “You Who Came from The Stars” starring Kim Soo-Hyun, who stole the hearts of all the females – high schoolers and working adults alike. Yes, he's one of those amongst others

who left a very high benchmark and that you are now currently measured against. Go ahead and search him up! You might want to find out more about your “marking scheme”. In the award-winning drama, he was a genius university professor by day, and a powerful force of nature by night when he has to protect his damsel in distress. He's dedicated, loaded and protective – what's not to like? Except the fact that he's an alien. Then again, everything else about him is out of this world. Or maybe, as fans may say, the fact that he's not human is the reason he's absolutely flawless.

According to the article “The Profound Influence of Television on Society” posted on [influence.bafree.net](http://influence.bafree.net), our experiences in life shape our character and personality. And people are influenced by the media they consume to a certain extent. Not only do advertisements affect our daily decisions, but even the sensational content in the movies and dramas we consume influence our personality.

Thoughts and perceptions of what is conventional or expected in real life

may change according to what we are exposed to. So this is how a person who watches a lot of drama serials, reads a lot of fictional stories, or idolises a certain artiste will come to have high expectations of his or her potential mate. The image of the “perfect” other half will be crafted according to the person's favourite character in the story.

What do you look for in a person? A capable boyfriend or girlfriend; or a reliable husband or wife? Hopefully, it's the latter. And if so, you should not just look at the surface of a person. Sure, some might experience love at first sight, but many of us won't share the same fortune and should really get to know the other person first. Interact to find out that person's character and personality, see if it's compatible with yours! Do you share the same values and beliefs? If not, it's probably going to be a rocky relationship because that person will live with you for years to come. Call me naïve, but I'd say the most important fact is that you get along, and understand each other. And love? Love can come later – as you get to know the person better.





**First Fires**  
By Jinat Rehana Begum  
Published by Ethos Books, 2015  
Price: \$18.60  
No. of pages: 192  
Available at: ethosbooks.com.sg and most major bookstores  
Reviewed by: SARAH RACHEL TEO

## Fighting Fires, Fighting Ourselves

A story of love, anguish and reflection, *First Fires* delivers a refreshing insight into the lives of a middle-class Malay family in Singapore.

Set between the 1970s and 1990s, Sal is the youngest of three siblings, born when the two-child policy was still in place. Now grown up, she finds herself losing her way, and seeks her late father for companionship.

Her disappearance forces her family members to re-look their past as they try to figure out where she went and why she would go away unknowingly.

With a keen eye for detail, Singapore poet and educator Jinat Rehana Begum is able to bring out the essence of each individual, the family dynamics, and Singapore's culture in this debut novel.

Jumping through the various characters of Ma (mother), older siblings Adam and Sarah, and Sal herself, *First Fires* offers an interesting perspective of Malay culture and Singapore history: from stories of *longkang* games, changing social conformity and traditional Malay cuisine.

Written in first person and almost conversational, it tells of the relationship between Sal and her family members from their childhood

past, to present adult life: how they changed, grew up and became distant as jobs and their own families came into their lives.

With the good and bad truthfully laid out, the book reveals the tensions and repressions held by each character through the years.

For Sal, “difficulties are fires”, and she tries to figure her way out of the maze around her, and fight the fires within her. The metaphor of a raging emotion and desperate cry for help entices readers to find out what exactly was the “fire” that caused her disappearance. Just like how her family members are in search of her, we too are looking for her.

Slowly, different possible reasons of why Sal disappeared start to unravel. Initially, it was thrilling to be part of the “search and rescue team” together with the rest of her family. Clues are dropped along the way in Sal's reflections. However, for the impatient me, the plot is way too slow. I found myself flipping to the back to find out where she is and what happened.

Even then, the novel offers an interesting take on the lives of the characters and leaves readers wondering if they had the same fires within them.



**The Adopted: Stories from Angkor**  
By Heng Siok Tian, Phan Ming Yen, Yeow Kai Chai, Yong Shu Hoong  
Published by Ethos Books, 2015  
Price: \$20.00  
No. of pages: 176  
Available at: ethosbooks.com.sg, Ethos Books, Select Books  
Reviewed by: RIZQINA MAHDZAR

## Ruminations Amid Ruins

Imagine being able to travel all the way to Cambodia, and marvel at the remnants of the majestic temples located in Angkor, as you weave in and out of passageways filled with Apsara motifs; all the while never having to leave your seat.

Then, imagine being transported back to the hustle and bustle in Singapore, before quickly revisiting the temples once again. That is exactly what reading *The Adopted: Stories of Angkor* feels like, as you immerse yourself into the world of the protagonists' lives. Ricocheting between these two countries, the 16 short stories are the result of a five-day trip to Siem Reap by four Singaporean writers.

With a different set of stories revolving around guilt, ruins, loss, the fear of change and forgiveness, the 176-page book cleverly combines the authors' communal experiences moulded by their different perspectives through parameters that were set for each day – a theme, stimulus, and quote. Several references are thus cleverly repeated throughout.

The book reads like a well-composed opera piece; a slow beginning eases into a crescendo in poetic intensity, towards an ending of fitting grandiosity.

A chance encounter between two individuals kicks off the series and quickly sets the mood of Yong Shu Hoong's stories, where the characters

seamlessly switch back and forth between the Kingdom (Angkor) and the little red dot (Singapore).

With images of monumental ruins already vividly painted by Hoong, Heng Siok Tian's story follows up the previous set with a more concrete explanation of Angkor's history, providing readers with a better understanding of the site's heritage, before playing around with the characters' own perceptions and imaginations.

Phan Ming Yen takes on a darker tone, injecting a dose of sobriety into the series. Spiral with the protagonists into a fearful discovery as the author envelopes you in the story from their point of view, plunging you into different realities.

Finally, immerse yourself into Yeow Kai Chai's intense plethora of scenes, where characters range from the mundane to the extraordinary, and explore the stretch of human desperation.

Don't be fooled by the simple nature of the writing, for the award-winning authors have cleverly disguised their stories with simple vocabulary to equip them with the desired fluidity. The spontaneous writing styles will keep you on the edge of your seat, flipping through page after page as you excitedly yet nervously anticipate the upcoming scenes.



**Cherry Days**  
By David Leo  
Published by Ethos Books, 2015  
Price: \$18.60  
No. of pages: 252  
Available at: ethosbooks.com.sg and all major bookstores  
Reviewed by: LEONARD TAN

## Take A Walk Down Memory Lane

Set in the 1950s, the story is told through the protagonist Skinny, who reveals what life was like in the *kampung* of his growing up years.

A highly descriptive story, the first chapter brings you back into the pre-urbanised, undeveloped Singapore that only most of the Gen-X and baby boomers would understand. Even if the reader has not lived through that era, David Leo's beautiful portraits of *kampung* scenes are a test for all your senses.

Skinny presumably tells the story with the eyes of a teenager and that helps

the readers, no matter how old you are, to understand what he is seeing. With that, certain parts of the story could have been more in-depth, but reading a story through the eyes of an innocent teenager who writes nothing but the truth, is touching.

The lives of the characters are intertwined with one another, but all of them are round, full and developed. No one in the *kampung* is missed out from the people closest to him like his Mum, *Nenek*, Lucy, Lee Choo, to his cousin-in-law Jade Moon and Lucy's uncle, the Opium Smoker.

Chapters are named after different characters, and in a way that can easily be understood by everyone. For example the cheeky boys in the *kampung* would be nicknamed “Mo-Peng”, “Big Head” and even “Gila” – nicknames we would use on our friends when we were young.

The book touches on folktales, old wives' tales and beliefs of the Chinese. If you aren't Chinese or do not understand the culture very much, you probably would find yourself lost while reading the story. Chinese terms like *kuachi*, *suay*, *ang chia* and even Malay terms like *jagong*, *mata* and *layang-layang* pepper the story; so if you don't know these local terms, you'd find yourself flipping to and fro the notes section frequently.

That said, kudos to the writer for sticking to writing a truly reflective story of Singaporean culture, about Singaporeans, for Singaporeans.

It would seem that the only mention of other races is when Skinny and their friends' soccer ball rolled into the Malay *kampung*. The tension that resulted is a reflection of the racial issues that still exist in Singapore, with race still a taboo topic.

*Cherry Days* ends with the people in the *kampung* moving out, as urbanisation takes over. Though set in the 1950s, the story is timeless with issues covered that are still relevant, current and reflective of what Singapore is now.





**Babel Via Negativa**  
By Desmond Kon Zhicheng-Mingde  
Published by Ethos Books, 2015  
Price: \$21.50  
No. of pages: 176  
Available at [ethosbooks.com.sg](http://ethosbooks.com.sg),  
BooksActually, Kinokuniya and MPH  
Reviewed by ELIZABETH GOH

## Beauty in Simplicity

If Twitter never seemed like a form of art, the first 80 pages of *Babel Via Negativa* proves otherwise. Utilising only 140 characters for each individual poem, these tweetfics are taken apart and interwoven into a narrative, transforming the brusqueness of a tweet into Singapore's first literary form, known as the *asingbol*.

Bagging a bronze at last year's Living Now Book Awards, this set of hybrid poetry delves into the idea of *ākolpomōtism*, which originates from two words, "empty" and "gulf". This emptiness is explored through the contrasts between the endless complexities and candour of the English language.

By using a mixture of literal and non-literal writing, some poems are seen as straightforward in terms of the words used, yet still contain depth and meaning (*You pushed the car, down the road. Into nowhere. / What now of us, red mirage ahead?*). In primary and secondary school, we may have been taught to use bombastic words to make our writing seem more substantial, but Kon's use of the *asingbol* attests to beauty in simplicity, the ease in which

language can flow without convolution. This play on complex simplicity creates a platform for the reader to define their own interpretation of the poems, and allows one to appreciate how language can create whole different perspectives if used simply or elaborately.

Like Kon's previous works, such as *For the Love of God*, *Babel Via Negativa* takes an introspective look into religious themes through another interesting poetry form – a cento written up as a play. In its characters' honest attempts to discover the truth of religion, Kon approaches the subject of God with an open mind. And this topic is something he is well informed about. Besides having a Fine Arts Masters degree in Creative Writing from the University of Notre Dame, he also has a Masters in Theology (World Religion) from Harvard University.

*Babel Via Negativa* is a collection that opens readers to the world of experimental literary works. If you're looking for a fresh take on different forms of poetry that seek to understand the English language as it is, this book is certainly one to pick up.



**These Foolish Things & Other Stories**  
By Yeo Wei Wei  
Published by Ethos Books  
Price: \$18.60  
No. of pages: 148  
Available at: [ethosbooks.com.sg](http://ethosbooks.com.sg)  
Reviewed by MEGAN TAN

## Haunting Tales That Capture The Heart

A sharp and haunting debut collection of stories by Singaporean writer, Yeo Wei Wei; *These Foolish Things & Other Stories* plays with a tinge of dark humour, evoking nostalgia right from the heart of the reader.

Launched during the Singapore Writers' Festival last year, these 10 short stories take you on a taunting journey of reminiscence. With elements inspired by everyday realism, the collection of stories is cleverly weaved into a series of enchanting tales.

Yeo's exacting prose is intricately composed and leads the reader into a position of empathy. The sparing dose of colloquialism adds to the local flavour and people in Singapore can expect to draw relevance of sorts to the happenings within each tale.

The eponymous story, "These Foolish Things", unfolds itself with a familiar backdrop for every Singaporean – the HDB apartment. It is a tale that has been thoughtfully paced as it unravels

an isolated woman's longing for passion, remembrance and love.

Another story, "Branch", is an idiosyncratic illustration of an average Singaporean's childhood and her encounters with an antique ornament. The vivid descriptions and compelling narratives leave you with just enough space to ponder: is it a ghostly tale or sentimental fiction? This is where Yeo brings the reader to a peculiar dimension – you seem to understand yet you cannot quite put a finger on it.

Having her works published in journals and anthologies across the region, this latest literary collection demonstrates Yeo's ability to extract a reader's imaginary counterparts and the emotions capsulated within locations that are close to the heart.

*These Foolish Things & Other Stories* is an easy but nevertheless, riveting read. It is the perfect companion for the ones always on the go or simply for those looking for something fast-to-read yet thought-provoking.

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