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WANTED

Volunteer museum guides

No experience necessary. National Heritage Board will now help recruit and train docents. Must commit to volunteering at least once a month for two years.

By SAMANTHA GOH

WITH two museums poised to re-open and a new heritage centre coming up, the National Heritage Board (NHB) wants a lot more volunteer museum guides.

It has launched its first official recruitment exercise for volunteer guides, and plans to add up to 500 of them to a pool of about 750 volunteers working in the six museums under NHB.

Ms Jennifer Yin, NHB director of volunteer management, said it hopes to recruit about 400 to 500 new volunteers. They will come in handy when the Indian Heritage Centre opens this year, along with the National Museum of Singapore and the Asian Civilisations

Museum, which will re-open this year after renovations.

Previously, the museums recruited their own guides or docents, usually about 100 to 150 of them at a time, through social media or word of mouth.

Under a new volunteer engagement division, NHB will help its volunteer groups recruit and train new members.

With its help, recruitment drives can be publicised more widely and training can be scaled up. More attention can be given to lesser-known Chinese- or Tamil-language guides too.

To become a volunteer guide, one has to complete a training course specific to the museum they want to help in and commit



(From left) Engineer Redzuan Rahman is a volunteer guide at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Ms Low Zhiqi is a guide at the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall and Ms Yuen Tan helps out at the National Museum of Singapore. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

to volunteering at least once a month for two years.

No prior knowledge is needed, as content will be taught.

Ms Yuen Tan, who has been giving tours at the National Museum of Singapore for a year and a half with docent group Museum Volunteers, said she signed up because she wanted to know more about her heritage.

"I started out being very ignorant about Singapore history," said Ms Tan, who is in her 30s and works in a system integration

firm. "All I knew was that we used to be a fishing village, and then we were separated (from Malaysia) in 1965. It made me feel ignorant that I didn't even know about my own roots."

To be ready to lead a group, volunteers had to go for an intensive 10-week programme that included lectures to brush up their knowledge, she added.

Mr Redzuan Rahmat, 37, an engineer in the solar manufacturing industry, has been volunteering at the Asian Civilisations Museum

for three years. He said his training lasted six months, including a final hour-long assessment.

"It is very demanding, but rewarding," he said. "The selection and training are not easy, not to mention having to commit for at least two years, but I would encourage you to try it if you have a passion for history and culture."

Ms Elaine Chong, president of the Friends of the Museum, volunteers at many museums, but likes telling the Singapore story at the National Museum History Gallery

the best. "It is a very enriching experience when my stories resonate with the visitors, or they become comfortable enough to share their stories with me," said the former IT company employee who is in her 50s.

An introductory session will be held by Museum Volunteers Singapore at the Asian Civilisations Museum on Feb 28. Those interested can also contact NHB via e-mail at nhb_volunteers@nhb.gov.sg for more information.

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