

Rain fails to dampen spirits of crowd at Istana CNY open house



Visitors watching a performance at the Istana open house on Monday. This was the first full-scale open house on Chinese New Year since the pandemic, and drew 17,554 visitors. There were also guided tours of the Istana's main building and grounds. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Samuel Devaraj

Though it was raining, university student Rayan Mansoor stuck to his plan and took his friend, an exchange student, to visit the Istana on Monday.

The 21-year-old Singapore permanent resident and his friend from the Netherlands were among 17,554 visitors at the Istana in the first full-scale open house on Chinese New Year since the pandemic.

Mr Rayan, who is from Pakistan, said he and his friend Souhail Boussalem, 22, whom he met at the Singapore Management University, decided to visit the Istana, as it is not open all the time.

He added: "It is the perfect opportunity to show him and check out the place for myself."

The open house on Monday was the third full-scale open house since Covid-19 restrictions were eased, after the ones on National Day and Deepavali in 2022, and drew the largest crowd.

Performances returned to this year's event. These were attended by President Halimah Yacob and her husband, Mr Mohamed Abdullah Alhabshee. They later mingled and took photos with the public.

This year also saw the return of guided tours of the Istana's main building. There were also guided tours to showcase the flora and fauna around the Istana's grounds. At about 3pm, about 100 people were in the queue for the tours, with some deciding to skip them due to the long wait and poor weather.

Ms Sandhya Gopinathan, 43, was there with her nine-year-old daughter. She noted the open house came at a perfect time for her child. The court officer said: "She knows a bit of Singapore history now that she's started learning it in school with social studies."

samuelsd@sph.com.sg