



LIBRARY VISITS

Singapore is known for its fabulous libraries and many delegates took the opportunity to take a behind-the-scenes look at public, school, university and special libraries while they attended IFLA.

Library@Chinatown

Library@Chinatown is the newest public library in Singapore. It opened in January 2013 in Chinatown Point, a shopping centre serving this bustling area of the city, and although the library caters for all ages, it is designed especially around the needs of seniors.

The 1,000 square metre library has been funded by the shopping centre developer in conjunction with a nearby temple. It is on the top floor of the shopping centre, but strong signage and high visibility glass walls encourage visitors to venture up to the fourth level.

The interior is a deliberate departure from other public libraries on the island. It has been designed to reflect Chinese culture, with a peony pattern carpet and fittings that emulate the Great Wall of China. The centrepiece is the Programme Zone, an open room which can be enclosed by folding panels in traditional Chinese style. There are national and international newspapers and magazines to browse, both in hard copy and on iPads, and the main collection mirrors the diversity of the community, with roughly 65% of books in Chinese, 35% in English. There are also materials in Malay and Tamil languages.

Seniors are encouraged to volunteer and they very much dictate what happens in the space, helping to make this a real community venture. In the Programme Zone there are talks on Chinese customs; opera, calligraphy and other workshops that reflect the library's surroundings.

CENTRAL LIBRARY

There are 22 public libraries in Singapore, run by the National Library, each with its own particular flavour.

Central public library's focus is on young people and families.

The library is in the basement below the National Library, but this doesn't prevent it being a light filled space with its own garden area.

The 6,400 square metre library wraps around the inner courtyard and contains the largest fiction collection of any of Singapore's public libraries, with a fiction advisory service for readers looking for expert help to find their next favourite author. The library also specialises in business, creative and design titles, and technology plays an important role. There are 14 online catalogue screens, four library e-kiosks, six self-checkout machines and 10 multi-media stations, and there are ereaders to borrow.

The new children's section, opened in May 2013, is a wonderland for young people, centred around a storytelling tree.

LEE KONG CHIAN REFERENCE LIBRARY

Also located in the National Library is the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, which occupies levels seven to 13 of the building. A magnificent space has been carved out of the modern high rise, with several floors merged into one to provide open exhibition areas and balconies from which book browsers can look down at the main reference floor far below.

In addition to the collection and study areas, there are several exhibition and gallery spaces, together with a full theatre – and behind the scenes, there is a staff gym.

The National Library Board has, since mid-year, had responsibility for the National Archives of Singapore. While the National Library and National Archives remain separate entities, the collections are seen as highly complementary. A working group is exploring cross-promotion and methods of improving accessibility to rare and historic materials.