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HELLO, 2010!



The eight-minute midnight fireworks display to herald the start of the new year, as seen from the 21st floor of the Mandarin Oriental hotel. An estimated crowd of more than 250,000 people flocked to Marina Bay to catch the show. Elsewhere, there were grassroots events, a free concert featuring local artists, and an overnight party with performances and movie screenings in Labrador Park. ST PHOTOS: SAMUEL HE

Celebrations aplenty in the city centre, clubs and in neighbourhoods

BY ANG YIYING

FOR Sunil Kumar Pattypati, 25, a permanent resident from India, seeing in the New Year with his wife yesterday was a particularly special moment.

He married Haritha, 21, just a month ago, so it was the first time they were seeing in the New Year as a married couple.

Not for them some place quiet.

They were among the estimated 250,000 people who thronged the Marina Bay strip, waiting to catch the eight-minute fireworks display.

And the crowd was not disappointed at the stroke of midnight, their hoots and cheers rising in volume as bursts of green, gold, red and blue lit up the skies in tune to music.

Out on the waters of Marina Bay, 20,000 "wishing spheres" bobbed. These white balls, bearing 500,000 wishes penned by the community, made for a visual-arts display.

Those who braved the road closures and barricades to get to Marina Bay said the hassle was worth it.

"Every year, it gets better," said housewife Catherine Ong, 32, who was there with her husband and three-year-old daughter.

People also thronged Siloso Beach on Sentosa, VivoCity, The Jewel Box on Mount Faber and nightspots.

Away from the city centre, others soaked up the atmosphere in their neighbourhoods. At least 10 countdown events were organised by grassroots groups from Tampines Central to Boon Lay Place.

These events, which were mostly free, pulled in crowds ranging from a few hundred to 15,000.

One event in Punggol East promoted family bonding and set a local record – verified by the Singapore Book of Records – for the most number of people wearing bandanas at the same time.

These squares of cloth, given out at the event, were worn in different ways – on the head, around necks or waists – by more than 5,000 people.

Assistant nurse Juhariyah Nur Hayati Abdul Hamid, 35, was there with her family. She said she liked it that the party was within walking distance of her home:



Entertainer Donna Daniels (right) and her dancers at the Labrador Park party with Myanmar national Mimzaw Dowkhin, 40, a member of the audience who gamely went up on stage to dance.

"It's still good enough, and we can still feel the year-end atmosphere."

Another local record was set on Thursday – that for the loudest group laugh recorded here, at 118 decibels – at the usual staid Asian Civilisations Museum.

Over in Nee Soon South, a free concert featuring local artists rocked for five hours. The grassroots groups which put the show together had held a similar event last year and charged a \$2 entry fee, but decided to make it free this time to make up for the gloom of last year.

Over at Labrador Park, 15,000 Singaporeans and new immigrants rang in the new year together with an overnight party hosted by the Radin Mas Citizens' Consultative Committee and Chinese immigrant society Hua Yuan Association.

Performances and free movie screenings were among the activities which kept people entertained.

China native Zhao Xuechao – aged 44 and now a citizen – was there until nearly daybreak. The financial services consultant said his job here had kept him from celebrating the New Year for nearly a decade.

His New Year wish: "A happier year ahead and better economic development."

ayiying@sph.com.sg