

LIFE&TIMES PEOPLE

Magic of a museum

With French Language Week 2015 in full swing, **Aneeta Sundararaj** talks to two volunteer guides who share their knowledge about Malaysia in French

THE two women couldn't be more different. Dany Picot, 63 is a blonde grandmother of four who speaks in clipped, excited tones and is full of energy. Josiane Reggane-Humbert, 45, meanwhile, has brown hair that is verging on black. Her mannerisms are controlled, and her speech, precise and concise. Dany has been in Malaysia since 1992, and Josiane arrived last year. What they do have in common is their warmth, love of museums and a desire to be volunteer guides who speak in French at Muzium Negara.

"The word museum is like magic," says Dany excitedly. "Imagine the opportunity you get. You're so lucky to learn about something you don't know. You share what you learn. A museum is absolutely... I can't think of a word." A moment later, she says: "I tell you, it's more than wonderful. And the guide? Ah, that's a person who knows so much."

She picks up a paper with a non-descript image on it. "Take something like this. It means nothing to you. Similarly, when you go into a museum, you look at a painting and it may mean nothing. It's just a painting. But the guide can tell you so much about that one

painting. He opens your eyes to so much."

Dany has been a volunteer at the museum since 2009. "I was introduced to it by some friends who were in a French-speaking association called Association Francophone de Malaisie. When I heard about this diploma course to become a guide, I wanted to do it."

Learning about a country, its people, culture and history is one thing. But where did this intense desire to share all the information gained come from?

"We are compelled to share anything we learn from the time we're in school," says Dany. "The teacher will give us a subject, we have to prepare for it, stand in front of the class and talk about this subject. It can be anything. The one I remember was



French volunteers at Muzium Negara, **Josiane Reggane-Humbert (left) and Dany Picot.**
PICTURES BY FARHA SALMA ABDULLAH

"And to properly know a country, to understand it, you have to know its history."

Josiane Reggane-Humbert

when I was 11 years old and I went to school in Saintes, Charente-Maritime. I had to memorise and recite a poem by a 17th century poet, Jean De La Fontaine. It was very long, but all his poems had a moral to them. We had no notes. Everything from memory."

"Yes," adds Josiane. "When I like something, I want to share it. And to properly know a country, to understand it, you have to know its history." She says that her ability to speak confidently probably comes from experience in the banking industry.

"I studied marketing and management. For many years, I was based in the Middle East and my work was about investigating connections that people have with the underground. For a long time, I truly believed I was doing the right thing. It was my career and I was very happy in it. Until I realised that many politicians didn't want what was right."

Adding, Josiane shares: So, I left. It was hard at first and I was disappointed. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had to ask myself what I really liked. And the answer was art. So, I went back to school and completed a Masters course in art. It's one thing to like art and another to make it your career. After I finished, I returned to Dubai and with some business partners, opened a contemporary art gallery in 2010."

In 2013, Josiane's circumstances changed, when her husband had an opportunity to work in Korea. "We wanted to explore Asia so we decided to go there. But Korea is not easy at all. You can't really do anything unless you speak Korean and very few people speak English. I tried to be a volunteer in a museum there, but it was difficult."

By 2014, they were on the move again. An opportunity arose for Josiane and her husband to relocate to Southeast Asia. "We chose Malaysia rather than Singapore. Singapore is just bling-bling. Just like another Dubai. We wanted to see real life."

Five months after she arrived, Josiane trained to become a

volunteer guide. "There is a theory part, then the practical. In the theory, university lecturers and experts in their fields come and speak to us. The topics can be anything from history of Malacca, religion, political system, anything. Then we have to make a three minute presentation on a specific artefact in the museum, a seven minute presentation on a topic and a 15 minute presentation on one of the four galleries in Muzium Negara."

Dany says experienced volunteers listen to the presentations and provide constructive criticism and feedback.

Josiane's favourite topic is Malaysia's unique system of rotating kingship. For Dany, it's the exhibits: The National Heritage Avalokiteshvara of Bidor and Buddha Brahmin statue (The Jalong Statue) because "they are proof of the Indo-Buddhist era that existed before Malacca."

Ever vivacious, Dany confides: "Actually, my best experience as a volunteer guide was last year. I still remember the date 13 December 2014. And it was in English. At first, I refused because my English is not so fluent. But these two girls, they begged me. One was from China and the other from America. Both spoke American English and I thought I couldn't understand them. But, you know what? I had a fantastic time. Two hours passed so fast."

Josiane sums up the entire purpose of volunteering at the museum when she says: "It is our way of giving back to Malaysia."

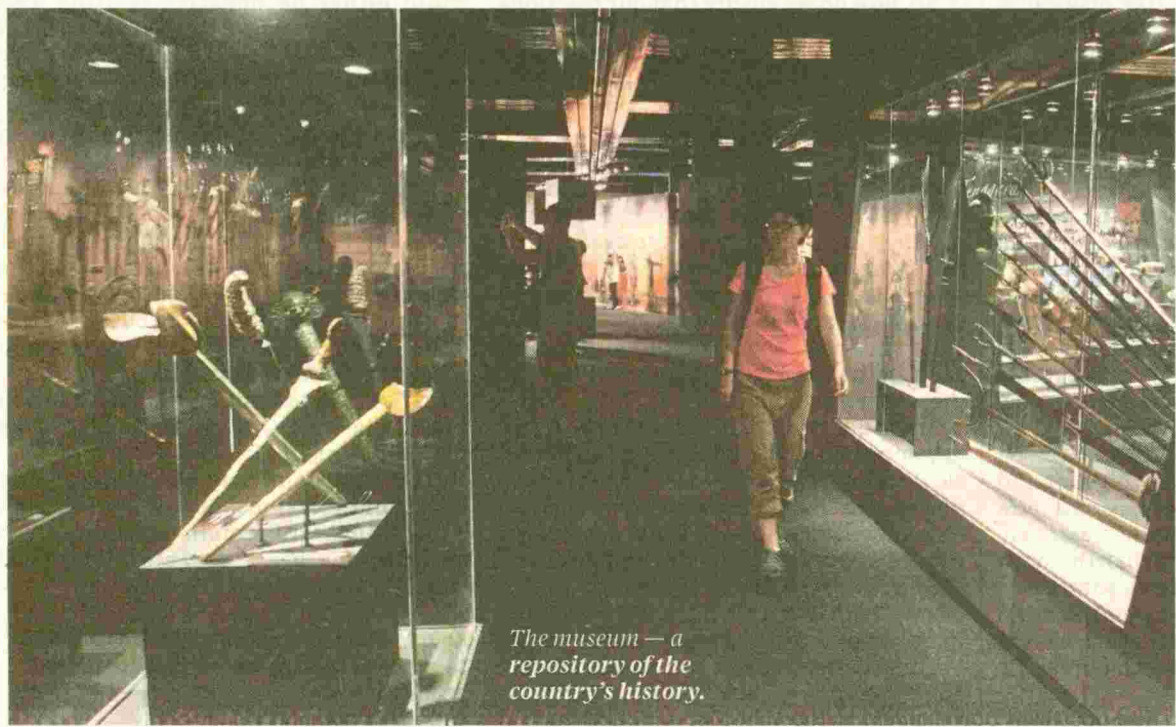
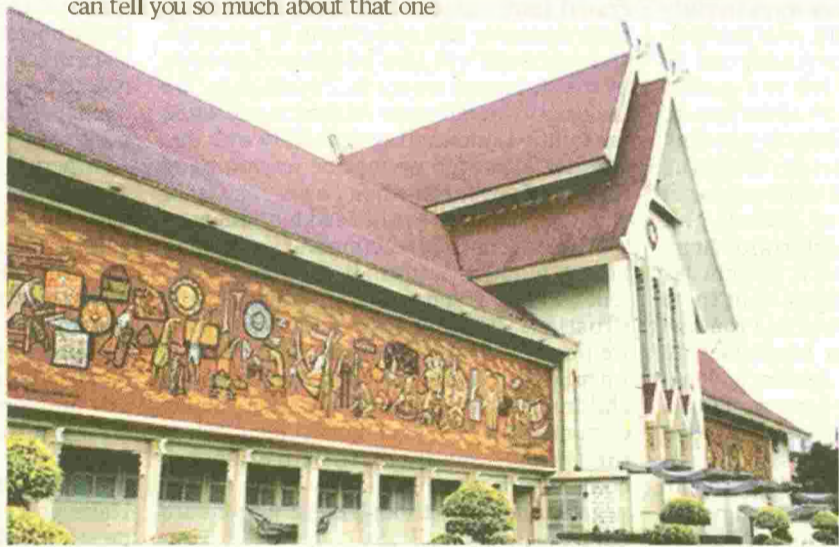
Francophonie Quiz

GET into the spirit of French Language Week 2015 and show off your knowledge of all things French by joining the Francophonie Quiz.

What: Francophonie Quiz — Open to the public with a registration fee of RM15 per participant. Prizes include a 3D/2N stay at Novotel Kuala Lumpur City Centre and gift sets from Christian Dior, l'Occitance and Yves Rocher.

Where: Wednesday (from 8.30pm-11pm)

Where: Restaurant la Creperie de Caroline, 33 Jalan Telawi 3, Bangsar
Call 017-213 0238 or email Caroline.Broutin@mycaroline14@gmail.com



The museum — a repository of the country's history.

