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A group of Japanese tourists at a local attraction on Feb 8, 2014. Customer satisfaction for the food and beverage (F&B) and tourism sectors here took a plunge this year, according to findings from the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore. -- PHOTO: ST FILE

SINGAPORE - This year's Singapore Writers Festival, which concluded on Nov 9, drew a total of 19,610 people to its 280 free and ticketed events, topping last year's 19,257.

More than half its ticketed programmes were sold out, including a lecture by American travel writer Paul Theroux, the experiential murder-mystery play *Body X*, as well as nine out of 12 writing workshops conducted by the likes of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Paul Muldoon and fantasy writer Ramond E. Feist.

The pre-festival events, including the Words Go Round programmes in schools, had 11,603 participants, and 3,477 attended the festival's visual arts events. This year, 3,200 Festival Passes were taken up, compared to 3,060 in 2013.

Outgoing festival director Paul Tan, who has overseen four editions of the festival, said in an e-mail statement that he was "delighted" with the turnout, and that it was "very encouraging to see more Singaporeans embrace the literary arts, especially home-grown writing... we've seen this from the crowds thronging the sessions featuring our Singapore writers, easily matching or even exceeding attendance at those of renowned international writers."

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These included panels featuring playwright Alfian Sa'at, writer Catherine Lim, and the festival's closing performance of *Apart*, a blend of theatre and poetry featuring the work of Singapore poets Cyril Wong, Pooja Nansi, Joshua Ip, Tania de Rozario and Jollin Tan, with dramaturgy by playwright Joel Tan.

Retired civil servant Julia D'Silva, in her 60s, was pleased with this year's lineup. She said: "My biggest challenge was choosing what to attend - many events that I was interested in took place across the same time slot. I also thought that the moderators at the discussions I attended were better than those I experienced last year."

The Straits Times was the official media partner for the festival, and many of the newspaper's editors and journalists participated in panel discussions and book launches.

Next year, the festival's nerve centre will be The Arts House, with poet and former Straits Times journalist and editor Yeow Kai Chai at the helm.

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