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TALKBACK

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Fancy a course on Bordeaux wine – in Bordeaux?

Community clubs to offer overseas learning trips from next year

■ BY MELISSA SIM

COMMUNITY clubs – neighbourhood stalwarts for affordable interest-group courses – will start offering overseas trips from next year.

These could be a wine tour in Bordeaux, a week-long, rice cultivation trip in Chiang Rai or an anti-ageing course in Thailand.

For food-mad Singaporeans, the People's Association (PA) is also exploring the possibility of overseas culinary courses conducted by chefs in that country.

The trips will be paid for by participants, but the PA said it will keep costs low. The first trip will be offered in June. Three trips are firmed up for now, with a few more in the pipeline.

Last year, the organisation started its "off-site courses" – courses conducted outside the community club – and the overseas courses are an extension of this. The number of off-site courses will rise from 100 last year to 140 next year.

The director of the PA's Lifeskills and Lifestyle Division, Ms Jacinta Lim, said moving beyond Singapore's shores was part of the effort to meet the rising aspirations of Singaporeans and residents.

The PA is hoping such courses will help community clubs reach out to a wider cross-section of residents, including the growing number of professionals, managers, executives and technicians, she said. She added that it would give participants the opportunity to learn in a relaxing holiday setting.

Families can also benefit.

The Eco Rice Farming Experience offered by the Taman Jurong Community Club, for example, could double as a mid-year family holiday to Thailand.

Course trainer Alvin Yong said he and his family met a local farmer on their travels and ended up developing a week-long course where participants plant rice and learn about irrigation and transplanting. "If we don't teach children, they will think food comes from a supermarket," he said. Adults, too, can learn about eco-consciousness and sustainable farming.

As for wine drinking, trainer George Wong said the experience would be enhanced by going to a wine-growing region. "You don't just taste wine, you get to see how it is made, harvest by hand,



Trainer George Wong says the experience of wine drinking would be enhanced by going to a wine-growing region. PHOTO: WINE LOVERS' CLUB



Course trainer Alvin Yong harvesting rice with his family while on holiday last year in Chiang Rai. Mr Yong has developed a week-long course where participants plant rice in the fields and learn about irrigation and transplanting. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MR ALVIN YONG

visit the labs. Singapore has no vineyards or wineries, so you must go overseas for such an experience."

The PA is trying to keep course prices low by sticking close to cost price.

Ms Lim said the courses would be "affordable to residents who can afford to, or are already making short holidays to nearby countries". Excluding airfare, the rice tour costs \$460. The wine tour, including airfare, costs \$6,180. Europe tours from

local travel agents, which include wine tours, cost from about \$5,000 to \$7,000.

So far, off-site courses have been well received. These courses attracted 4,520 participants this year, 87 per cent more than last year. Next year, the PA hopes to attract more than 5,000 participants.

But will there be takers for overseas courses? SIM student Eveleen Teng, 22, said cost would be a factor. "It depends how much more you have to pay, and

what are the things you can learn."

Previous course participant Kelvin Ho, 33, is keen on overseas cooking courses.

The corporate finance executive said: "If we could go to Korea or Japan and learn things like how to cut a fish properly, I would consider that. If I am going to go overseas to learn something, I must make sure it is something practical and I can use the skill when I get back."

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Overseas courses

WINERIES TOUR IN BORDEAUX

- **When:** October 2010
- **Cost:** \$6,180 per participant (Includes five-day fully guided Bordeaux wine learning experience, airfare, accommodation, transport, wine tours)
- Organised by Geylang Serai Community Club

ECO RICE FARMING EXPERIENCE

- **When:** June 2010
- **Cost:** \$460 per participant (Includes one week fully guided course, accommodation, meals, coaching on rice farming, cultural tour of the hill tribes in Chiang Rai region)
- Organised by Taman Jurong Community Club