

An Interview with Mr David Chew

Deputy Director, Festivals & Precinct Development, National Heritage Board, and Festival Director, Singapore Heritage Festival



David Chew

Image Credit: David Chew

Culture Academy	Hi David, could you introduce yourself and the Singapore Heritage Festival?
David Chew	Hi, I am David, and I'm the Festival Director of the Singapore Heritage Festival, the longest running national festival on Singapore heritage. Having been around for 19 years, the festival has celebrated heritage in many ways over the years. It first started out in 2004 as a national festival focusing on Singapore's heritage and our connections with our ASEAN neighbours, then moved to a festival celebrating the rich, multicultural, ethnic heritage of Singapore, as the festival expanded out into various parts of Singapore through various satellite hubs in heartland areas of Singapore. This naturally evolved into becoming a festival which then celebrated the unique identities of the different precincts of the island in 2016, to what it is today, a new era of the festival borne during the COVID-19 pandemic, celebrating national milestone and achievements through different thematic focuses every year.
Culture Academy	Now that we are almost two years into the "new normal", what is one important reason why we need to futureproof our festivals beyond the pandemic?
David Chew	Futureproofing anything, I feel, is the world we live in today, with or without COVID-19. Pandemics, world movements, technological and digital shifts, shape and alter the way we experience the world we live in today. The pandemic merely accelerated the pace of this need to adapt. Audiences, people, are at the core of what makes festivals, which is primarily social in nature. So we need to constantly keep up with the way people experience the world, how they process and consume information, how behavioral habits shift more quickly than ever before. We can only strive to keep up!
Culture Academy	Having organised two digital editions of the Singapore Heritage Festival, what is one unique lesson that you and your team have learnt about the needs of digital audiences during the pandemic?
David Chew	Brevity is key! While surely everyone had more time to consume digital content, spending more time at home, both the online format itself as well as sheer deluge of digital news and content out there makes this format a very

	<p>competitive one. Being concise, attractive (yet without being click-baity!) and being able to go in-depth into an issue within a very short frame of time (ideally under 5 minutes), became some benchmarks and parameters we worked towards. You essentially work against the shortening attention span of digital viewers today.</p>
Culture Academy	<p>What are some of the key trends in festival planning today that are shaping the festivals of the future?</p>
David Chew	<p>Our audiences are constantly evolving alongside technological and digital innovations and trends. This changes the way they consume and experience everything in the world today, online, and offline. Thus, things like the gamification of experiences have transcended the digital gaming realm into the physical world, and are now integrated into many areas of our daily lives and human behaviour. The lines between the real world and digital world are increasingly blurring, and it is definitely something to keep in mind when planning the festival experience of today.</p> <p>The other impact of the pandemic on festivals today which calls for more safe distancing and smaller group sizes that translate to more intimate experiences, is probably more welcomed than not. If anything, this de-centralisation of the mega, mass nature of festivals, creates an opportunity for more in-depth, meaningful experiences as smaller, more intimate experiences arise amidst these new requirements for smaller group settings in a pandemic state.</p>