

Kechara at Expat Expo

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The weekend of 29th and 30th October 2007 was another opportunity for the boys and girls of Kechara to have fun at an exhibition. It was the Expat Expo held at the Exhibition Hall of the KL Convention Center. Kechara Media and Publications (KMP) and Kechara Mystical Treasures (KMT), our Bangsar outlet, came together again in a winning combination perfected during the Mines' Buddhist Cultural Festival.

At Kechara Mystical Treasures, a veritable storm was whipped up in the days before the event. A week before, Henry Ooi was at KMT to carefully select items with the event audience in mind. These items were then taken off the shelves, carefully recorded by David Lai and Ovanda Nicholl, and packed with the help of Samuel (our new staff of KMT) and Suresh. Likewise in KMP, the entire crew of Shin Tan, JJ Chong, Joseph Chan and Susan Lim were busy packing for the exhibition.

When we arrived at the convention center, we were dismayed by a smaller than expected booth and wrongly installed fixtures. Nevertheless, in Kechara we turn lemons into lemonade (excuse the cliché) so we maximized on the space available and the fixtures were promptly corrected by the contractor.

On the exhibition day, everything was ready. KMP had spotlights shining and the pristine iMac playing Rinpoche's videos while the KMT side had the serene smiles of Buddha, Tara and our volunteers to greet people. Saraswati Arts Department also had a small corner with Joy Kam painting wonderful tsa-tsas and passing out Saraswati flyers to curious on-lookers. KMP was manned by the main crew of Liaison Joseph Chan, Liaison Susan Lim, Shin Tan, JJ Chong and Sharon while on the KMT side; we had Liaison Henry Ooi, Liaison Ruby Khong, Ovanda Nicoll, David Lai, Liaison Wan, Liaison Chia and Suzan Ng. This does not include the large battalion of Kechara volunteers with the likes of Annette Chan, Madam Lim, Liaison JP Thong, Liaison Mr. Ngeow, Liaison Paul Yap, new-comer Justin Cheah and many more. Several friends of Kechara also came to look, support and shop at our booth.



Somehow, wherever Kechara takes a booth, we are always the most 'happening' booth around. Our booth was always the most crowded due to our volunteers explaining and providing helpful information to those taking a closer look. Our booth was also in stark contrast to the investment, property, health and other promotional booths surrounding us. One passerby even remarked that she had wanted to come in to look but our booth had been too crowded.

The visitors for the event were mostly expatriates, as expected, and good explanations on the Himalayan arts and crafts were well received. Besides our members, there were many visitors from all over the world – from England, the Netherlands and all the way to Mauritius. Many of the visitors appeared to know little about Tibet and Buddhism and were very keen to know more. They were also very much intrigued by the spiritual aspect of our booth. The level of interest contrasted with the previous Buddhist fair, where the predominantly local Buddhist crowd needed less convincing and explanation. Our singing bowls, incense, jewellery, prayer wheels and mandalas generated the most interest on the outlets' side.



On the KMP side, titles like, 'Why I make myself unhappy' and 'Nothing to Change' were most popular due to requests for introductory materials by shoppers and recommendations by volunteers. DVD titles of 'Nothing to Change & Enemy within' and 'Karma and its relations to vows' were also popular as well for the same reason.



In retrospect, the fair itself did not generate as much an interest with the expatriate community as expected. The moderate turnout at the fair was probably due to a lack of media exposure. However, the two days went by with much talking, cajoling and getting as many people as possible to take home a book, DVD or an item from the outlets. Sales for KMP closed at a moderate RM2000 for the two days while on the outlets side, they achieved a modest RM9000 of sales. The last RM2000 sales for the outlets came at the final hour with frantic talking and pushing by dedicated Liaison Paul Yap, Suzan Ng and Liaison Chia Song Peng. By 8pm the exhibition was all over. Everything was swiftly packed in boxes to be sent back and just like the first day, the remaining volunteers and KMP staff and friends did their dedications. We reflected not on

the sales but upon furthering the reputation of our organization, our Lama, our members and Gaden Monastery by a notch into the community of expatriates who may not have expected to encounter spirituality at such an unlikely place.