Penang launches audio descriptive walk at Unesco Heritage Site

by christopher tan

GEORGE TOWN: The various buildings and artefacts – even a tree – on a 3km trail of the Unesco Heritage Site in Penang came “alive” for the blind during their audio descriptive walk.

Touted to be the country’s first of its kind, guides from the George Town World Heritage Inc (GTWHI), St George’s Church and Sun Yat Sen Museum have been trained to lead the participants on the trail, covering many of the city’s major attractions.

The three-hour route will cover The Star Pitt Street, St George’s Church, Sri Maha Mariamman Temple, Kapitan Keling Mosque, Acheen Street Mosque and the Goddess of Mercy Temple on Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling, locally known as the Harmony Street.

The audio descriptive walk, which was launched yesterday, is conducted in Malay, English and Mandarin and costs RM350 per group of between one and 15 people.

Among the over 10 people from the St Nicholas’ Home taking part in the tour were Marilyn Lia, 21, from Indonesia, and Kieu Oanh, 24, from Vietnam, who are undergoing a two-week IT course in Malaysia.

Lia said she was excited to take part in the walk.

“I was able to feel the tree bark located within the church compound and learn its history from the guide,” she said.

Kieu said she could imagine the beauty of the church just from the guide’s narration.

“He described in detail on what was surrounding us and it helped us picture the church,” she said.

Besides the vivid description, the guides will encourage participants to use their other senses, such as touch, on various landmarks, such as the memorial of Captain Francis Light and smell the spices in Little India.

GTWHI general manager Lim Chooi Ping said she hoped that this audio descriptive walk would be the first of many to be included for the disabled to increase their awareness of heritage in Penang.

National Council for the Blind council member and St Nicholas’ Home chairman Rev Charles Samuel said: “Audio description simply means making the visual verbal.

“I congratulate the 10 guides who received their audio describer badges. They are the first group in the country.”

For bookings, call Chung Wei at 04-261 6605 with a three-day notice.