

## Big date nights

Two large-scale dating events will be held next month, including one brought in from Japan, -ST

Melissa Kok

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Participants in MachiCon Japan, where about 200 dating events were organised under the same name across the country last year.

Bachelor Terry Poh strikes you immediately as a friendly person.

The tall, slim and tanned 31-year-old greeted SundayLife! warmly with a firm handshake and a big smile when we met him on Thursday.

But like an increasing number of men in his age bracket, the senior technician with the Singapore Air Force has not met Ms Right.

However, unlike those mentioned in the recently released Marriage And Parenthood Study 2012 that found singles are generally too tired or have insufficient time to date or meet new people, he has been getting out and about.

He has been taking part in dating activities for the past couple of years, where singles like himself get to mingle, form friendships and, hopefully, meet a potential partner.

He has made plenty of friends along the way but no relationship has blossomed yet.

Still, he is hoping that Cupid will take aim in his direction when he attends a masquerade ball for 500 people at the Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention on Saturday.

The ball is organised by the Social Development Network (SDN), the current incarnation of government matchmaking agency Social Development Unit, and is its largest speed-dating event to date.

The dinner and dance is one of two large-scale dating events involving hundreds of singles held here next month.

The other event is MachiCon, a dating event that originated in Japan and where up to 200 singles will mingle at designated restaurants in the River Valley and Boat Quay areas. This is the first time MachiCon is being held outside Japan.

The two dating events come in the wake of the Marriage And Parenthood Study commissioned by the National Population and Talent Division, and another that it commissioned and also released recently, the Population In Brief 2012 report.

In the marriage study, out of 2,120 singles polled, 83 per cent want to get married. But the population report showed that singlehood rates have risen over the years.

Among Singaporeans between 30 and 34 years old, the proportion of singles was higher in 2011 (44.2 per cent for males and 31 per cent for females) compared to 2001 (33.5 per cent for males and 22.3 per cent for females).

Saturday's ball is part of a five-week Dating Fest organised by the agency, where singles can participate in a variety of activities run by 11 dating agencies accredited by the network.

Singles pay a registration fee of S\$35 to attend the ball.

The event will work in a speed-dating style, where singles will be allocated seats at the tables during the dinner service and swop seats every 10 minutes or so.

This will allow them to meet as many people as possible during the 5 1/2-hour event.

A spokesman for the network said participants in their past dating events have benefited, noting that post-event surveys showed that at least 70 per cent of participants said they enjoyed themselves. And 80 per cent said they made at least one new friend and 76 per cent would use dating services again.

Mr Poh, who has attended previous events organised by the network, said he did not mind that there will be so many singles taking part in the event, as he felt it was a good opportunity to "expand my social network as much as possible".

But the optimistic bachelor added: "I'm just looking for someone who is family-oriented, not too focused on work, filial, easy to get along with and pleasant-looking."

Ms Michelle Goh, 32, owner of dating agency CompleteMe, one of the 11 agencies supporting the Dating Fest, said: "You won't know the whole bunch of people but it's a good way to know as many people as possible. Where else will you find a large pool of singles at any one time? My advice is to create an impression through the way you talk or the way you dress."

On Feb 25, about 200 singles are expected to gather for MachiCon, organised by Japanese marketing company Foodrink News.

A concept that was started in Japan in 2004, it is a popular large-scale dating event that attracts more than 1,000 singles, with about 200 MachiCons held across Japan last year alone.

Mr Masaaki Yasuda, director of Foodrink News, said he decided to bring MachiCon to Singapore to promote Japanese cuisine and to encourage couples to get together.

He said: "I heard Singapore has a low birth rate. In Japan, some MachiCon events are organised by local governments to raise the birth rate in their towns, and they say it is effective."

Participants, who pay a registration fee of \$60 for women and \$100 for men, will gather at Katanashi Japanese Restaurant in Boat Quay, where they can sit wherever they like. There will be staff on hand to encourage the singles to mingle and rotate seats to meet new people.

After an hour, participants can move on to two other Japanese restaurants of their choice, out of a list of eight participating outlets in the River Valley, Boat Quay and Eu Tong Sen Street area.

Mr Yasuda said response to the event has been good so far, and they are "working towards our aim" of 200 participants.

Receptionist Lee Jie Xing, 29, who heard about MachiCon online and has registered for it, said: "I signed up for the event because I think I need to find someone suitable, as I am not getting younger. In the best-case scenario, I hope I will meet a future husband who will be a responsible family man."

[melk@sph.com.sg](mailto:melk@sph.com.sg)

**For more details on the two events, go to [www.datingfest2013.com](http://www.datingfest2013.com) and [www.machicon.sg](http://www.machicon.sg)**

**What do you think of mass dating events? Write to [suntimes@sph.com.sg](mailto:suntimes@sph.com.sg)**

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