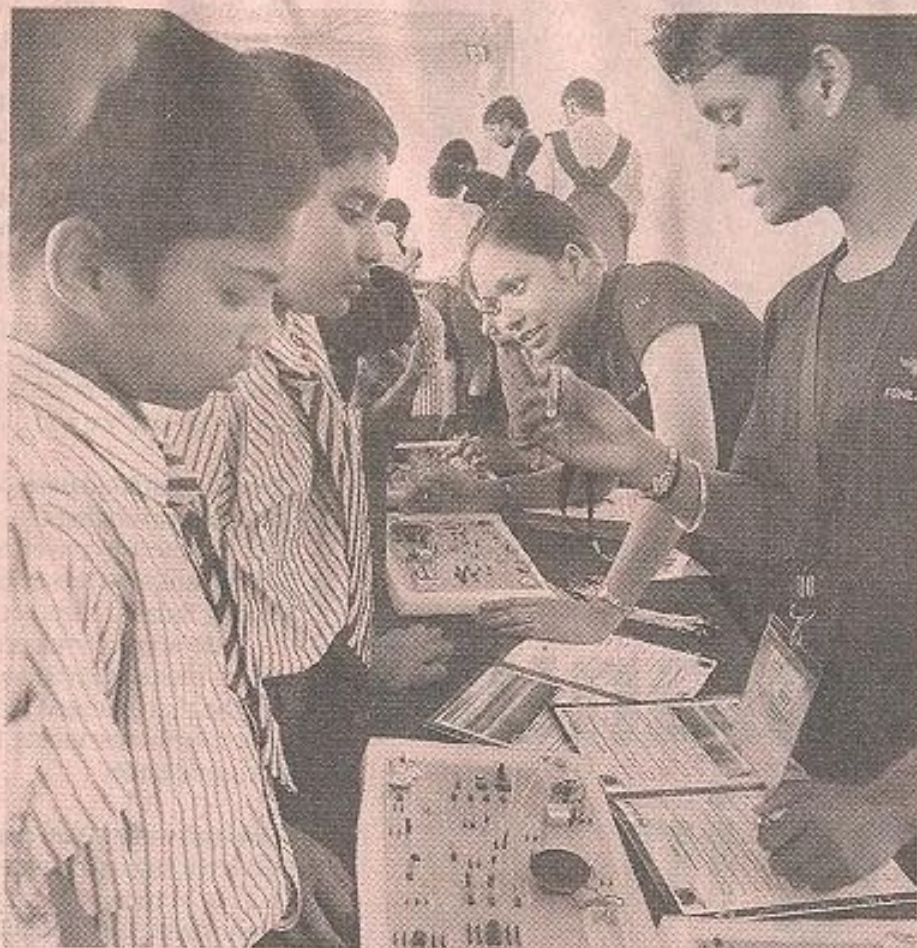


The serial experiments

From "designing" slime to working in the ER — the first Indian edition of the Edinburgh International Science Festival promises a host of experiences for children and adults alike



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Ian Felton, Deputy High Commissioner at the British High Commission in Bangalore, is locked in a head-to-head contest to see if the bubbles he is blowing are bigger and better than those by a group of chirpy little girls. The girls, who are from the NGO Asha Deep, are giving Felton a run for his money. The space resounds with laughter as they blow bubbles into each other's faces. In a corner of the same tent, various adults vie with the children for their turn to step on a platform and create a giant bubble around themselves. Most of them have a ludicrously pleased expression when they are inside the bubble for a few seconds, before it bursts.

It's the first day of the Edinburgh International Science Festival in Bangalore, and though the event is aimed mainly at children, the adults who have trooped in are clearly having as much fun, especially in the

'World of Bubbles,' one of the 18 exhibits or 'experiences' at the festival. This is the first time the 25-year-old festival celebrating science and technology is coming to India, and it will be something of a pilot run to see what works and what doesn't; whether there will be future editions and what those would be like. "The festival industry is



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Director, Edinburgh International Science Festival

very big in Edinburgh, worth around £250 million, with the biggest being the Fringe Festival in August. The city is quiet in April, so we were wondering what we could showcase at that time; something that Edinburgh is strong in and which no one else does. That's how the festival came about," says

Simon Gage, director of the Edinburgh International Science Festival, who has been on board since its second edition.

In Edinburgh, the scale is much larger, with over 200 events, including a lot of talks, and it looks to draw both children and adults. In Bangalore, the focus is on children and families. "This is a great first step and it will change and evolve," says Gage.

Being held at Bhartiya City in Thanisandra, five of the "experiences" are those that were showcased earlier in

Edinburgh. Apart from the 'World of Bubbles,' the other possible crowd-pleasers are the Emergency Room, or ER, where children can try their hand at removing gallstones through key-hole surgery, and at dressing wounds on an artificial body, with equipment loaned by surgical equipment manufacturers. Assisting the children in their critical surgical procedures is Lewis Hou, whose day job is working as a neuroscientist at the University of Edinburgh. "The children learn different things, such as the importance of hygiene when they are shown how to dress wounds," says Hou.

There is also Splat-Tastic, where children (and adults!) can "design" their own slime, and learn about polymers, and Pongy Potions, where you can brew as fragrant or stinky a potion as you wish.

At the sound and light pavilion, the folks from Science Adda, one of the Indian exhibitors, demonstrate the uniqueness of voices and sounds with the help of a giant flute, which makes flames leap with the frequency of sound. They also demonstrate how musical fountains actually seem to dance to music. Ravindra Krishnappa and Kumar Nagaraja, co-founders of Science Adda, say such demonstrations help children relate to applications they would have learnt about in the classrooms. "There were already people in India doing similar work that offers hands-on experiences in science. So this festival is a great platform to marry international experiences with what's happening here. But it's quite a challenge to create experiences that can be shrunk to a few minutes and which can be repeated over and over to different groups of people," says Anand Kanwar of Art Konnect, the event-management company that, along with the realty wing of the Bhartiya group, helped bring the festival to India.

The biggest challenge in replicating the festival, albeit on a much smaller scale, was infrastructure. "In Edinburgh, the entire city celebrates — from events at parks to scientific discussions at bars. Entire buildings are given up for it," says Kanwar.

The entrance fee, at ₹500 per child and ₹300 per adult (or ₹1300 for two adults and two children) is a bit steep, but the organisers say that with the expenses involved in transporting equipment from Edinburgh along with local infrastructure costs, the tickets could not be priced any cheaper. A crowd of around 50,000 is expected over the ten days till September 8. Future editions of the festival will, of course, depend on the response to the first. But Kanwar says enquiries from Mumbai and Delhi have already come in about hosting it in those cities, and it is likely to happen in December or January.