



An aerial photograph of Pasir Ris Hotel, 1958
Aerial photographs by the British Royal Air Force between 1940 to 1970s, from a collection held by the National Archives of Singapore. Crown copyright.

The Pasir Ris Heritage Trail is part of the National Heritage Board's ongoing efforts to document and present the history and social memories of places in Singapore. We hope this trail will bring back fond memories for those who have worked, lived or played in the area, and serve as a useful source of information for visitors and new residents.

PASIR RIS HERITAGE TRAIL

A COMPANION GUIDE



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Pasir Ris Beach, 1958
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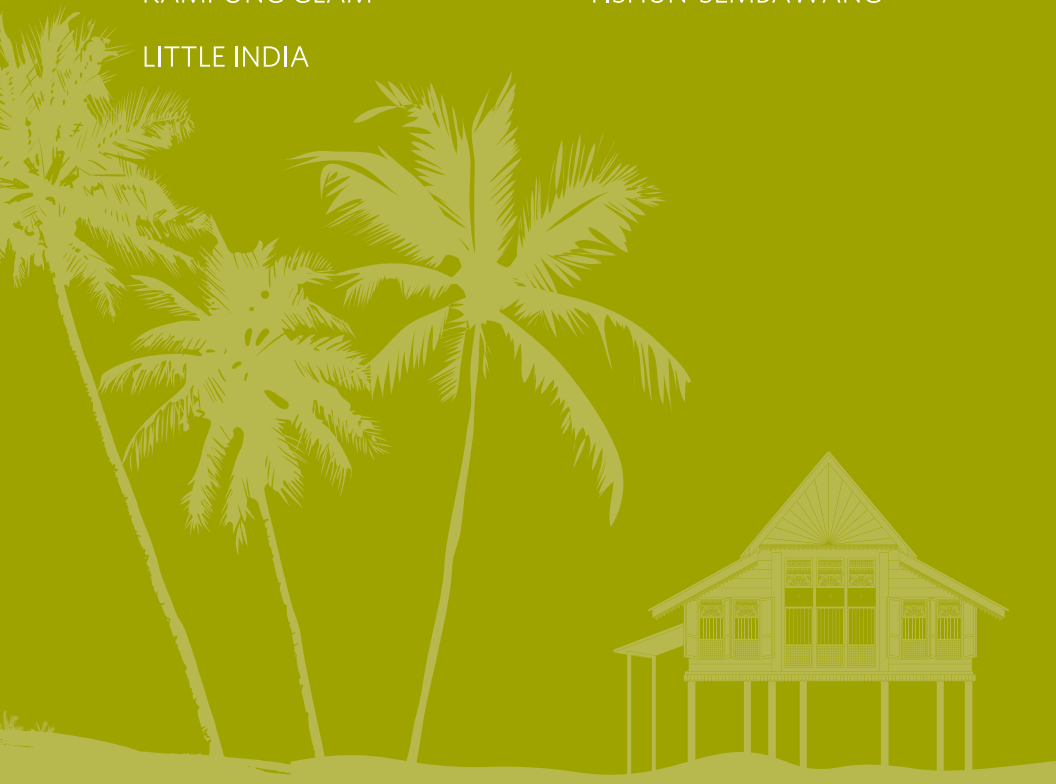
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INTRODUCTION



Pasir Ris Beach, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Mention Pasir Ris, and people are likely to recall memories of seaside adventures, holiday stays in chalets and public housing flats distinguished by maritime-themed design motifs. More senior members of the public may remember the Pasir Ris Hotel, converted from a tycoon's mansion, the bucolic kampongs set amidst coconut and rubber estates, as well as early tourist attractions such as Golden Palace Holiday Resort, and Villa Saujana and Dari Laut in Kampong Loyang.

Over the decades, the coastal heritage of Pasir Ris and Loyang has encompassed fishing kampongs, beachside bungalows and resorts. Until the 1950s, the white sands of the beaches, placid waters and beautiful views were enjoyed mainly by the wealthy who built bungalows and weekend houses in the area, or those lucky enough to receive an invite for a getaway. The building of public

amenities at Pasir Ris Beach in 1958, and the later development of holiday residences by the People's Association and the Singapore Labour Foundation paved the way for the pleasures of Pasir Ris to be more affordable and accessible to a wider cross section of society.

Today, it is not only the design motifs of lighthouses, sea creatures and ships around Pasir Ris that evoke the area's coastal and riverine heritage. Preserved amid public housing estates, the mangroves of Sungei Api Api offer glimpses into the area's rural past, when kampong residents made innovative use of mangrove resources to build boats and houses.

Follow us on this trail as we explore the history and heritage of Pasir Ris through the stories of the people who have lived, worked and played here, as well as the institutions they have built over the decades.

EARLY HISTORY

PLACE NAMES AND MAPPING

The coastal heritage of Pasir Ris is inscribed in its place name, which is said to derive from two Malay words: *pasir* and *hiris*, which mean "sand" and "to slice or shred" respectively in Malay, and likely references the fine quality of the sand along the beach. An alternative etymology defines the word *ris* as an archaic Malay term for a bolt-rope (rope sewn around the edges of a sail), which could refer to the shape of the narrow strip of beach here. The references to fine sand in the above-mentioned place names could also point to the sand ridges and mangrove sand commonly found in the area.

Loyang, which is situated to the east of Pasir Ris, may also have been named because of its proximity to the sea. The word *loyang* means "brass" in Malay, and is thought to spring from the copper-coloured, brackish water of the coast and mangroves in the vicinity and at Sungei Loyang.

Pasir Ris first appears in the 1839 *Map of the Island of Singapore and Its Dependencies* drawn by Wahid Khan of the Surveyor-General's Office. In this map, the northern coastline of the Teban and Tampinis (Tampines) district, which stretched from the mouth of the Serangoon River to that of the Tampines River, was named Pasir Riso.

This spelling variant of the name Pasir Ris was one of many, as the transliteration of Malay words into English was not yet standardised in the 19th century. Across maps, newspaper articles, journals and books, Pasir Ris has been spelt Passier Reis, Passier Ries, Passir Ris, Pasir Riso and even Passeir Rice, which appeared in a map by the esteemed Government Surveyor John Turnbull Thomson.

During Thomson's stint as the Straits Settlements' Government Surveyor between

1841 and 1855, he produced the earliest maps that detailed the interior of Singapore during the colonial era. These included the 1852 *Map of Singapore Island and its Dependencies*, which shows the kampongs or villages of Passir Ris and Liong, Sungei Tampenis and Sungei Liong. He also noted that the residents of Passir Ris and Liong were predominantly Malay, while an unnamed Chinese village stood on the western bank of what is today Sungei Api Api.

By the 1880s, maps show large tracts of land around Pasir Ris being turned from forest to plantation use, including Teban Estate and Tampinis Estate to the south. Loyang, east of Sungei Tampines, still retained much of its forests except for some encroachment of plantations. However, most maps during this time present little information on Pasir Ris itself, beyond a small patch of coconut plantations on the coast. The fact that maps of the area show few plantations may indicate that the marshes and sandy sections of Pasir Ris were not viable for cash crops.

Nevertheless, one map from 1898 notes a private bungalow built on the coast by that year. That same map also shows some of the roads leading to Pasir Ris, including one branching off from Tampines Road, and several minor roads connecting to the villages on the eastern flank of Sungei Serangoon.

More information about Pasir Ris can be gleaned from maps produced in the early 20th century. Notably, a 1924 topographical map on p. 4 shows the physical landscape of Pasir Ris before it was greatly reshaped by development. It noted five streams on the western portion of the Pasir Ris coast: Sungei Sembilang, Sungei Haji Isa, Sungei Kechek, Sungei Kadut and Sungei Taib. As shown in the map, the coastline as well as the river banks of Sungei Blukar and nearby Sungei



GAPORE UNITED PLANTATIONS
MUKIM No XXX
E B A N

MUKIM No XXIX
TAMPINES

A topographical map showing the many rivers in Pasir Ris, 1924
The National Archives, United Kingdom Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

YAP ESTATE

HUN YEANG ESTATE

THAI HIN ESTATE

LOH LAM ESTATE

BT. SEMBAWANG EST.

Pulau Ketam

Kg. Jelutong

Kg. Bahru

Kg. Pasir Ris

Kg. Tampines Bahru

Kg. S. Loyang

S. Keoh

S. SERANGOON

S. Sembawang

S. Hajjisa

S. Keohok

S. Kadut

S. Taib

S. Blukar

S. Blak

S. Jelutong

S. Jepun

S. Ampat

S. Edal

S. Lubok Gajah

S. Api Api

S. Prapat

S. TAMPINES

S. Loh

TAMPINES ROAD

TAMPINES ROAD



An aerial view of Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines, 1958
Aerial photographs by the British Royal Air Force between 1940 to 1970s, from a collection held by the National Archives of Singapore.
Crown copyright.

Serangoon wound through mangrove swamps and mudflats. Today, only Sungei Kadut remains, which runs alongside the Park Connector adjacent to Pasir Ris Drive 12.

Another place that has seen significant transformation is the area around Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines. A century ago, Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines ran snaking courses and converged before opening out to the sea, unlike today, where they have separate river mouths. A pair of streams, Sungei Lubok Gatal and Sungei Prapat, was part of the river system as well. The 1924 topographical map's surveyor also noted a range of hills to the east of Sungei Api Api, and the coastline had two distinct types of terrain, possibly mudflats in the west and sand in the east.

The 1924 map also notes a Kampong Pasir Ris on the flank of Sungei Api Api, off what is likely later known as Elias Road, and a cluster of buildings where that road meets the coast, which is likely Joseph Aaron Elias' bungalow,

plantation and workers' quarters. The area around today's Pasir Ris Central was occupied by the Loh Lam Estate, and Kampong Sungei Loyang was located on the eastern section of the coast, next to the river it shared a name with. Plantations, mainly rubber and coconut, were scattered throughout Pasir Ris, and there were sand quarries on the fringes of the swamps around Sungei Api Api.

Decades later, a topographic map from 1945 shows a similar physical landscape, but differentiates Kampong Pasir Ris and Pasir Ris Village. The kampong remains off Elias Road, while the village is located at the intersection of Tampines Road and Elias Road, where a school also stands. Kampong Tampines is found on the fringes of the mangrove swamp near the confluence of the two rivers, while Kampong Tampines Bahru is at the 11th milestone of Tampines Road. At the western edge of Pasir Ris is Kampong Sungei Blukar and Kampong Beremban, roughly where Pasir Ris Industrial Drive 1 and Halus Link are today (more details about kampongs can be found on p. 12).

NATURAL LANDSCAPE

Early in the 1800s, before timber logging and large-scale agriculture began to transform its landscape, Pasir Ris comprised mainly of three ecological habitats: lowland forest, mangrove forest and mudflats; and sandy areas. The Dipterocarp family of trees was prevalent in the lowland forests, while the mangrove forests were mainly found within the intertidal zones, such as on the coast and around the rivers. In Pasir Ris, the most common mangrove plants and trees included those of the Api Api family (*Avicennia*), Bakau Minyak (*Rhizophora*) and Perepat (*Sonneratia*) species.

Mangroves, which thrive on brackish and salty water that would usually kill most plants, dotted the swamp areas around the numerous rivers, streams and coastline. These plants lent their names to rivers and kampongs, while their timber, leaves and fruits shaped the way people lived, worked and built homes in Pasir Ris.

An account by James Richardson Logan, who visited Pasir Ris in 1846 while on a boat trip to Pulau Ubin, provides some insight into the landscape of the area at the time:

"...a dry sandy tract covered with low trees, not crowded, and therefore the more pleasing. Farther on, the ground rose slightly and became a little clayey rising at length into a ridge of

nearly pure sand... from the summit the ridge was seen to stretch away on both sides, with hollows descending from it... to a broad mangrove swamp, through which flows the Sangi (Sungei) Tampinis.

"Emerging from the thicket, on retracing our steps, we stood on the beach at Pasir Ris, and admired the secluded and beautiful view. The Strait (of Johor), landlocked on every side, was transformed, to the eye, into a placid lake about three miles long and two miles broad. It appears to be surrounded by jungle, the mangrove predominating wherever there has originally been a deep indentation in the coast."

The Strait and beach that Lagan described above not only defined the physical landscape of Pasir Ris, but also shaped the livelihoods of early settlers in the area. The sea and rivers brought fish and the beaches *lala* clams and coconuts, providing the resources for



Bakau Minyak mangrove tree, undated
Courtesy of Jennie Tang, National Parks Board



Mangrove trees near the mouth of Sungei Tampines, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

a fishing industry, while the white sand and views drew the wealthy and their bungalows, and later set the scene for public beaches and resorts.

FOREST CLEARANCE AND EARLY RESOURCE USE

Before the colonial era, Pasir Ris was sparsely inhabited, and the few people who lived here and in neighbouring areas on Singapore's north-eastern coast had limited impact on the natural environment. These early communities, which may have included Orang Laut (known to reside at the estuaries of the Punggol and Seletar rivers and on the nearby island of Pulau Ubin) largely subsisted on fishing. They utilised mangrove timber for boat-building, constructing houses and making charcoal, but managed these resources sustainably and did not denude the forests of Pasir Ris.

The arrival of the British in 1819 signalled a step-up in resource exploitation across Singapore, and Pasir Ris was no different. Timber logging and cash crop agriculture caused the mass clearance of Singapore's forests, and the island's primary forest cover was reduced by 90 per cent by the end of the 19th century. Writing in 1881, Henry James Murton, the Superintendent of the Botanic Gardens, observed:

"One or two facts are painfully evident - that in the early days of colonisation the original forests were recklessly destroyed wherever it occupied land that could be adapted to any other purpose, however small; while the largest and finest trees were used for fuel or charcoal, no attempts were made to rectify the mistake by subsequent planting..."

In Pasir Ris however, the forest clearance had different causes and followed different patterns from other areas in Singapore. While much of the northern and western parts of the island were denuded for gambier and pepper cultivation, the reach of these plantations, mainly owned and operated by the Chinese, was limited here. There were isolated gambier plantations in Pasir Ris, as Logan noted in his



Pasir Ris with houses on stilts against a background of coconut trees, 1930s
RAFSA Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

1846 account, but gambier generally did not do well in swampy areas and hillsides. This helped save sections of woods and mangroves along streams and rivers, small patches of which still thrive in Pasir Ris today.

Instead, forest clearance in Pasir Ris was driven mainly by timber logging, especially of the commercially valuable Tempinis trees. In 1846, Logan noted that there was a small village of Chinese woodcutters near the mouth of Sungei Tampines, that the sawyers were in conflict with gambier planters and at times "felled a strip (of forest) to intercept (the planters') advance".

However, the sandy, alluvial soil of Pasir Ris produced forests that were less verdant than elsewhere in Singapore, with Logan observing that "the forest on the hillocks around us was peculiarly stunted, owing to the barrenness of the soil". That meant that agriculture of staple foods, such as rice, was marginal as well.

This may account for the relatively low population density in Pasir Ris until the mid-20th century, possibly explaining the small number of kampongs in Pasir Ris even though there were villages to the west in Punggol and Seletar and to the east in Changi. In the 1800s, kampong residents living at the south-eastern coast planted rice padi fields around freshwater swamps in Siglap and Tanah Merah. However, this was not possible in Pasir Ris, as access to fresh water was limited.

PLANTATIONS

By the mid-1800s, the gambier and pepper industries in Singapore ceased to be lucrative due to conflicts, economic shifts and the degradation of the soil. Timber logging continued in Pasir Ris and its surrounding areas however, even as sections of Loyang were designated as part of the Changi Forest Reserve by the colonial authorities.

While gambier and pepper failed to take hold in Pasir Ris in the early 1800s, later plantations were more successful from a commercial point of view. Coconuts were planted and harvested by both large estates and village smallholders, and these plantations were noted in maps of the 19th century. Kampong residents also planted pineapple, vegetables, bananas, tapioca and other crops, usually on a subsistence basis.

The larger estates usually combined a number of cash crops - Teban and Tampinis Estates, both of which appear in an 1885 map of Pasir Ris, planted coconuts, rubber and citronella. The Teban Estate, also known as Teban Louisa, was owned by Hermann Katz of the the Katz Brothers trading firm in the 19th century, while Tampinis Estate had multiple shareholders before it was sold to the Bukit Sembawang group in 1910.

While the people of Southeast Asia had for centuries treasured the coconut for its myriad uses, the commercial imperative that drove coconut plantations during the colonial era was toddy production. An alcoholic drink distilled from coconut sap, toddy was consumed largely by labourers and the working class. In the early 1900s, government reports and newspaper articles



An aerial view of coconut plantations in Pasir Ris, 1946
Aerial photographs by the British Royal Air Force between 1940 to 1970s, from a collection held by the National Archives of Singapore. Crown copyright.



A coconut plantation in Singapore, 1923
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

noted a proliferation of coconut plantations in the north-east of Singapore, linking them to the toddy trade.

From the 1930s, the colonial government took a direct hand in this trade, regulating that toddy could only be sold from shops operated by the Government Monopolies Department. A newspaper article from 1936 described the coconut tapping process for toddy production:

"In Singapore, the vast cocoanut [sic] plantations off Tampenis Road supply the toddy needs of the island. The (government-appointed) contractor has under him about 60 climbers (tree tappers) and each one of them scales an average of 20 to 25 trees each day!"

By the early 1900s, plantations of both smallholders and larger commercial entities came to dominate the Pasir Ris landscape. A survey map in 1924 shows plantations stretching from Kampong Teban in the west to the edge of the Changi Forest Reserve in the east, with rubber and coconut plantations dominating the landscape. The only areas that the plantations could not penetrate were the mangrove swamps and the coastal mudflats.

SEASIDE LIVING IN THE COLONIAL ERA

The white sand of the beaches, the sea breeze and the views of the Strait of Johor, likened to a placid lake by James Richardson Logan in 1846, drew the elite of colonial society to Pasir Ris and Loyang. Private bungalows had appeared on the Pasir Ris coast by the late 19th century, the most prominent being

Joseph Aaron Elias's 12-bedroom bungalow, which was later converted into the Pasir Ris Hotel. The 1924 survey map also shows a jetty near Kampong Loyang, which would have made travel into the area easier for bungalow owners and holidaymakers.

Wealthy business people used bungalows in this area as holiday residences or, in line with the thinking of the day, as sanatoriums, which were quiet places of natural beauty and fresh air, where Europeans could recover from health issues that were sometimes linked to the teeming urbanity of Asian cities or the sweltering, humid climate. During the colonial era, the amenities at the seaside bungalows would have included bathing *pagars* ("gates" in Malay), which were swimming areas in the sea fenced off with wooden stakes, beachfront, freshwater wells, dance halls and gardens.

The bungalows were often located within a wider estate of plantations and workers' quarters. With the owner not always in residence, the plantations were supervised by an estate manager who lived on the grounds with other workers and oversaw its security and day to day operations. At its peak, Elias' 164-acre coconut and rubber estate was said to employ some 80 workers.

Many of these bungalow owners also sought to rent out the house for short stays. In the late 19th century, estate agent H. D. Chopard offered a "commodious Bungalow, 40 feet x 50 feet, situate at Pasir Ris Cocoanut Estate" for rent at \$2 a day, \$3 for two days, \$10 per week and \$25 for the month. It was also common to find bungalow owners offering their holiday residences to relatives and friends, social clubs, community and youth groups, charities, sporting associations and others for day activities or short-term stays for free. These groups held picnics, beach parties, camps, anniversaries and annual meetings at the Pasir Ris bungalows, which were also in demand among the newly-wed for receptions and honeymoons.

Teo Kim Eng, a rubber magnate and tobacco trader who owned an estate of 100 acres in Pasir Ris and Tampines, was particularly noted for his generosity in this regard. He hosted a diverse range of groups at his estate, from the Swift and Eclipse badminton associations to the Siew Sin Sia Club and the Straits Chinese Methodist Youth Fellowship, as well as neighbourhood kids who regularly turned up at his door.

A newspaper article from 1947 noted that Teo turned down an offer to rent his

bungalows for \$14,400 annually, preferring instead to open it for the use of his friends and social groups, and hundreds of people were estimated to visit his estate each week. The millionaire was also said to join his labourers on the estate on weekends, a *changkol* (hoe) in hand, for manual work. Teo was not the exception among the millionaire bungalow owners of Pasir Ris, with Jewish broker Ezra Nathan, movie moguls Loke Wan Tho and Run Run Shaw among the others who regularly allowed groups to use their holiday residences.



An aerial photograph of Pasir Ris Hotel, which was formerly Joseph Aaron Elias' bungalow, 1958
Aerial photographs by the British Royal Air Force between 1940 to 1970s, from a collection held by the National Archives of Singapore. Crown copyright.

KAMPONG DAYS

Unlike the public housing towns and residential estates that came after them, kampongs in Singapore were not planned spaces that had clearly demarcated boundaries. These clusters of residences expanded or shrank organically, and their demographics evolved in response to changing economic or social climates. The naming of these kampongs was also fluid, and in some areas, residents identified their kampongs using the milestone system and major roadways like Tampines Road, while in other places, colloquial names like Kampong Elias were more commonly used than official village names.

In the Tampines-Pasir Ris-Loyang area, the kampongs that stretched from Sungei Serangoon in the west to Sungei Loyang in the east defied strictly established boundaries. Demarcated kampongs outlined in official cartographic records sometimes differed from accounts given by residents on the ground, and

the boundaries of these kampongs sometimes shifted or overlapped over time.

One example was Ti Kong Tua, the village named for its Taoist temple and often regarded as part of Tampines, even though former residents remembered the kampong stretching into the Elias Road area. Perhaps because the kampongs of the north-east were not densely populated, many residents shared familial and social ties across different villages. As Henry Ong (b. 1965), who lived near the 9th milestone of Tampines Road at Jalan Bumbun Selatan, recalled:

"If you were to plot (the social network) from Tampines all the way to Pasir Ris and Loyang, you would probably find a link with every single household. Whether it is through brothers, sisters, aunties or uncles, someone will know someone else from a particular household."



A kampong in Pasir Ris, 1980
Courtesy of the Housing & Development Board

KAMPONG PASIR RIS AND PASIR RIS VILLAGE (KAMPONG ELIAS)

Kampong Pasir Ris was located along one of the meandering loops of Sungei Api Api, and its natural environment was characterised by mangrove and tidal swamps. In the 19th century, the village may have stretched to the sea, before entrepreneur Joseph Aaron Elias acquired the beachfront area for his holiday bungalow and plantation estate.

The earliest reference to Kampong Pasir Ris' location comes in colonial surveyor John Turnbull Thomson's 1852 map, and Thomson noted that the coastal village was predominantly populated by Malays. Another unnamed village southward was marked as having a Chinese population. Maps after the 1920s show that Kampong Pasir Ris shifted a short distance north-west of its original location and could be accessed via a track branching off Elias Road.

Early accounts of Kampong Pasir Ris are scarce, and those that are known suggest a sparsely populated settlement in the 19th century. Nevertheless, a more substantial account from 1846 provided more details of the village. Describing Pasir Ris while on a boat trip to Pulau Ubin, the lawyer and author James Richardson Logan described the small size of the kampong, which from the number of houses was likely less than 100 residents:

"... proceeding from (the mouth of Sungei Serangoon) eastward (we) landed at Pasir Ris, a kampong, or hamlet, consisting of half-a-dozen huts on a sandy level thrown up by the sea and overgrown with weeds, some of which were covered with pretty flowers. A few coconut trees are scattered about. On the right and left the thicket encroaches on the narrow open space; behind it there is a small, stunted, and neglected fruit garden, backed by the uncleared wood. A path full of puddles, from which our feet were but half protected by some sticks, led us across the open ground into a dry sandy tract covered with low trees, not crowded, and therefore the more pleasing."



Kampong Pasir Ris, 1986
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Kampong Pasir Ris, 1986
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



A poster for the movie Pendeekar Bujang Lapok
Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

Like other villages in the Pasir Ris and Tampines districts, Kampong Pasir Ris stood through the rise and fall of the gambier industry in the mid-19th century. By 1924, the areas surrounding the kampong were taken up by rubber plantations such as Loh Lam Estate, as well as scattered plantings of pineapple and vegetable gardens. Sand quarries were also developed along Sungei Api Api, although the larger quarries were closer to Sungei Tampines.

As the estate of the Jewish entrepreneur Elias constituted a large proportion of this area, Elias' rubber and coconut plantations influenced the demographics and livelihoods of the kampongs here. Oral history accounts also noted that Javanese *mandors* ("foremen" in Malay) and workers who had come to work on the Elias estate established another kampong in the vicinity of Elias Road known as Pasir Ris Village.



The rural surrounds of the area where Pasir Ris Central is today, 1982
Courtesy of the Housing & Development Board

Pasir Ris Village was known colloquially as Kampong Elias, and descendants and later arrivals to the village continued to tend the plantations and fruit orchards or worked as fishermen. In the 1930s, there were at least 200 residents in Kampong Elias. Haji Samin Mansor (b. 1914), a longtime resident of the village, recalled that many Malay residents had joined the early Javanese settlers by the 1970s, with some 50 Malay families living in houses around Elias Road and Jalan Ang Siang Kong. By the 1970s, there were numerous aquaculture ponds in Kampong Pasir Ris and Pasir Ris Village, with residents breeding fish and prawns for food and ornamental fish for sale.

Set amongst fruit orchards and streams, Kampong Elias was known for its bucolic beauty, and the beautiful surrounds of the area were captured in several movies produced by film companies including Cathay-Keris and

Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions. Haji Samin remembered some scenes in the P. Ramlee movie *Pendekar Bujang Lapok* (1959, "The Bachelor Warriors" in Malay) being shot in the kampong. The acclaimed actor-director

P. Ramlee also visited the village multiple times and financed the construction of a bridge here. Kampong Elias was redeveloped in the 1980s, and some of its residents later resettled in Pasir Ris Town.

FORMER SIN MIN SCHOOL NEAR PASIR RIS VILLAGE

Pasir Ris Village was likely to have had a significant Chinese population too, as the Mandarin-medium Sin Min School was located in the vicinity. Chua Liang (b. 1934), who lived in the village after arriving from China as a child, remembered life in the kampong:

"Outside the school were all villages with attap houses, farmers and rubber plantations. The students were all from the villages in the neighbourhood, they were mostly the children of parents who worked in rubber plantations or vegetable farmers... or reared chickens and pigs.

"After lessons (in the morning), I went to the small streams to catch fish and prawns... and went to the swamp to pick up attap seeds. We might (also) catch small spiders or play with the sand. Every afternoon, it was (also) the duty of my younger brother and I to carry a big basket and pick the hard shells of rubber seeds (in the plantations) and also the dried branches of trees (for firewood). These shells are the best thing to cook rice with.

"(The village children) knew which type of fruits could be picked and eaten, which type shouldn't be eaten. They also knew which animals we couldn't touch, the places that we could find (small fish) and where the water was the clearest. They also had their knowledge on rearing chickens, pigs and ducks... there were many things (that) they could teach us, so after school, I followed them to their village and we just ran about in the rural area."

Chua's mother, Hong Fangping, was the principal of the school, and Chua recalled that

the curriculum in the late 1930s and 1940s followed that of schools in China:

"There were many Sin Min primary schools in Singapore then... we had to state clearly that (this) was the one at Pasir Ris. The school building was in one long row... made of wood and the roof was of zinc sheets. Whenever it rained, the noise was really very loud. Besides the classrooms, there was the hostel for teachers. In the whole of the school, I think there were 200 to 300 persons then. Including my mother, there were about four to five teachers. The textbooks were the same as those used in China. For English language, we learned the ABCs and simple words, we learned very little of it."

The school also put up performances and organised fairs, which drew many of the kampong's residents:

"My mother organised fun fairs because they had never had this kind of thing in the village (previously). The children would go up and perform, (and) the people in the whole village came to watch us - it was really bustling with activities then. I remember that the costumes were actually flags from clan associations sewed (to become) our costumes for the performances. We borrowed a few lorries (and) parked (them) in a row, (and we) placed some wooden planks (on top)... and it became a stage. They (lorries) were normally used to carry sand - the white sands of Pasir Ris. These lorries were really very useful. Sometimes when young chaps wanted to go to town and bring along some young girls with them, they would scrub the lorries until they shone and bring the girls to the city."



Jamil bin Rimon's aunty and cousin at Kampong Guan Choon (within Kampong Tampines), undated
Courtesy of Jamil bin Rimon



Jamil bin Rimon's cousins posing with a snake caught inside Kampong Guan Choon (within Kampong Tampines), undated
Courtesy of Jamil bin Rimon

KAMPONG TAMPINES AND KAMPONG TAMPINES BAHRU

Kampong Tampines was located to the west of Pasir Ris Village and shared a number of demographic similarities with its neighbour. Like Pasir Ris Village, this kampong was said to have been founded in the early 20th century by Javanese plantation workers and fishermen, and also counted Bugis from Sulawesi in Indonesia among its early residents.

Starting with some seven families, the village grew to become home to more than 40 families after World War II. Its residents worked in the rubber and coconut estates, ran cottage industries such as *belacan* (fermented shrimp paste) production and stone-crafting, or fished in Sungei Api Api, Sungei Tampines and the Johor Strait.

Before land reclamation and the construction of canals along Sungei Api Api from the 1960s, the river flowed close to the houses of Kampong Tampines at high tide, bringing a rich bounty of fish, prawns and crabs within easy reach of its residents. By the 1920s, the village had expanded westward towards Sungei Tampines, spawning the settlement of Kampong Tampines Bahru ("new Tampines village" in Malay).

The tobacco entrepreneur Teo Kim Eng acquired much of the land in the kampong in the mid-20th century and the road leading to the village was named Jalan Guan Choon after Teo's company. Kampong Tampines also subsequently gained the second name of Kampong Guan Choon. Teo's three-storey holiday bungalow and plantation estate, which he often lent out to social clubs, groups from various institutions and local residents for picnics and other gatherings, was also located within the kampong (more on Teo Kim Eng can be found on p. 11).

Jamil bin Rimon (b. 1951), a former resident of Kampong Guan Choon, recalled the togetherness of the community in Pasir Ris

and the easy mixing of Malays and Chinese in the village:

"In the evenings, we would sit near the mosque, where there was a public telephone nearby, Malays and Chinese together. We would chat through the night, or decide to go fishing or swimming in (the water-filled pits of) the sand quarries, or shoot flying foxes. We knew almost everybody in the kampongs around Pasir Ris, we would visit each other's kampongs to play sepak takraw (a Southeast Asian ball game) or to play carom. Sometimes we would row to Pulau Ubin for fishing or to pick durians."

"Kampong people took care of each other - if anything (such as communal conflict) happened (in other parts of Singapore), (outsiders) would have to deal with us first. If a Malay (came into our village looking for Chinese), they would have to get past our kampong's Malays first - the same in reverse."

"The land our house was built on was owned by a neighbour in the kampong, but he didn't collect a single cent in rent, we only paid property tax to the government. Whenever there was a harvest of mangoes or rambutans, every house would get its share."

The residents of Kampong Tampines also constructed Masjid Jihad, where they gathered for prayers and *maulud* (observances of Prophet Mohammad's birthday). The mosque also functioned as a social space for the community where villagers would meet for celebrations and events. A Muslim cemetery was also located within the kampong.

Like Pasir Ris Village, Kampong Tampines' picturesque environment also made it a popular location for films. Among the films shot in the kampong were *Semerah Padi* (1956, "Red Rice Village"), *Batu Belah Batu Bertangkap* (1959, "Stone Trap"), *Hantu Jerangkong* (1957, "Ghost Skull"), *Pusaka Pontianak* (1965, "The Pontianak Legacy"), *Siti Muslihat* (1962, Siti's Tricks) and *Antara Dua Darjat* (1960, "Between Two Classes").

LUBUK GANTANG AND BELACAN

Being rivers where freshwater and seawater tides met, Sungei Api Api, Sungei Tampines and the numerous small streams in this area were rich in wildlife. Harboured by the mangrove environment, prawns, fishes and crabs were plentiful in the rivers and proved fine pickings for the residents nearby.

One spot that was known for its abundance of prawns was Lubuk Gantang, where the streams converged and the tides mixed. The place name may have come from the Malay words *lubuk* (“where the streams meet”) and *gantang* (“a bushel”, possibly referring to the basket-fulls of prawns that one could expect to garner here).

At Lubuk Gantang, in the rivers and out at sea, kampong residents caught prawns that they sold at the markets or made into *belacan*, a fermented shrimp paste. Families in Pasir Ris Village and Kampong Tampines ran *belacan* cottage industries, with longtime resident Haji Samin Mansoor recalled that *belacan* production reached its peak in the 1950s. He also remembered that in the 1970s, one *kati* (250 grams) of prawns could be sold for the equivalent of more than three kilograms of rice.

The production of *belacan*, a pungent condiment beloved by Southeast Asians for its umami-filled flavours, provided livelihoods for kampong residents including Hajah

Sapiah Osman (b. 1914), who was 72 and still catching prawns to make *belacan* when she was featured in a newspaper article in 1986. “It’s been my work for 35 years. I think the sea air is my medicine. If I don’t go out to the sea, my body feels unwell,” she said.

Each morning around dawn, Hajah Sapiah went out to sea to catch the prawns known to locals as *udang geragau*. Wading into the sea, she used a 1-metre-long net handled with wooden sticks, and collected prawns in a basket fastened to her waist. “If I’m lucky, I can catch dozens of prawns quickly. If not, I could be waiting for one to two hours,” she said.

Returning to her home in Kampong Tampines, Hajah Sapiah would then clean the prawns in freshwater, mix them with salt to delay their spoilage, before laying them out on sacks to dry and ferment. The dried prawns were then ground in a hand-operated machine, put into a round mould and then cut into pieces. *Belacan* could come in red or white varieties, following the colours or species of the prawns.

Hajah Sapiah and other villagers also made *cincolok*, another condiment made from dried prawn. From the 1960s, redevelopment and land reclamation began diminishing the supply of prawns and other seafood, in turn affecting the production of *belacan* and *cincolok*. Younger kampong residents also moved out of the villages and into flats, leading to the decline of the cottage industries.

KAMPONG LOYANG

Kampong Loyang was first noted as a Malay settlement marked at the mouth of Sungei Loyang on John Turnbull Thomson’s 1852 *Map of Singapore Island and its Dependencies*, confirming the presence of settlers during the early colonial period. Then, the village’s name was spelt Lioung, likely referencing the copper-coloured, brackish waters of the river, as the word *loyang* means “brass” in Malay.

Another map, from 1924, shows the village with the name of Kampong Sungei Loyang, flanked by the wetlands and Sungei Endal to its west.

As Kampong Sungei Loyang grew, the village separated into three sections: Loyang Laut (nearer to the sea); Kampong Loyang; and Kampong Bahru (“new village” in Malay). Former resident Jamilah binte Abdul Salam

(b. 1961) recalled that many of the three kampongs’ newer residents had moved there from the nearby island of Pulau Ubin. Jamilah described life in Kampong Loyang in the 1960s and 1970s:

“There was a mosque (Masjid Kampong Loyang Besar) and a community centre (CC) in the village. I remember watching wayang (street opera) at the CC. Movies were shown occasionally, projected onto a cloth (screen) at the CC and we would bring mats there. There was also an outdoor television set mounted on tall frames for the villagers to watch daily.

“There was a very big pig farm, chicken farms, an orchid garden and the Loyang Offshore Supply Base. Many of my family (members) worked at the base - my father, brother all worked there at one time. The pig farm was just behind our place and we would hear the water pump start at 8am - (it was then that the neighbours would be) feeding and washing the pigs. As the farm was on higher ground, some of the water would flow down into the village.

“Many of the residents in the kampong were related. It was a mixed village with Malay and

Chinese residents, but no Indian families. But there were two mama shops (sundry shops) run by Indians and one by Chinese. The Indian provision shops sold dry goods while the Chinese shop sold fish, vegetables and biscuits. (The villagers) could also ‘utang’ (purchase on credit) at these shops and pay at the end of the month.”

A bungalow at 191 Jalan Loyang Besar, believed to have been built in 1938, was previously within the village and now stands as one of the few physical reminders of the kampong days. The house, featuring distinctive red windows



The former Masjid Kampong Loyang Besar, 1986
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



A mama shop (sundry shop) at Kampong Sungei Loyang, 1986
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

and wall detailing, stone lions at the gate as well as a tiled roof, is today known colloquially as the Pasir Ris Red House or Loyang Red House.

Previous residents of the house include Sir Percy McNeice (1902-1998, a former chairman of the Singapore Improvement Trust and the first president of the municipal City Council) and his wife, Lady Yuen-Peng McNeice (1917-2012, a philanthropist noted for her contributions to the Singapore Botanic Gardens and biodiversity protection

KAMPONG SOLIDARITY

Ethel Dorothy Desker (b. 1910) worked as an English teacher at Loyang Primary School in the mid-1960s, and shared her memories of the school and the kampong solidarity of the people in Loyang then:

"I was happy (to work at Loyang Primary School), but I was shocked to see how poor the children were. (When) I wanted to give them work to do, they had no exercise books. (They would say) 'teacher, I have no pencil', things like that. So I collected all the pencils from (my) house... exercise books too, I took them all to the school for the children. The children having walked so far, they brought in the sand. It was all very sandy where they lived so the classroom was full of sand every day when they came. Most of them were fishermen's children or their parents were gardeners. The mothers tried to earn an income by working with the European (families based at Loyang, Pasir Ris and Changi). During the (monsoon) season, you can't go fishing, they were handicapped that way, shortage of funds.

"The children came from a poor community so they suffered many hardships... they were always a lovely lot of children to deal with. They were polite and what I liked about them is that they shared with each other whatever they had. I spoke

in Singapore). In 1964, the house was sold to Tang Choon Keng (1901-2000), the tycoon founder of the Tangs departmental store.

Over time, as the building remained unoccupied for years after the redevelopment of Pasir Ris and Loyang, the house became the subject of urban myths and ghost stories. Today, a preschool operates out of the Pasir Ris Red House. Also located within Kampong Loyang were the former tourist attractions of Villa Saujana and Dari Laut (more on the two sites can be found on p. 38).

to the head to ask the doctor to recommend milk for the children. Even then, we have difficulties preparing the milk because... we had no stove (at the school). The teachers at the time (most of them) were not qualified, so they were only paid meagre salaries of \$200 (a month). That was hardly enough... so they fished to increase their income.

"(The school) didn't have modern sanitation. It was a bucket system, very difficult to keep clean. The walls dividing the classrooms were wooden, so you could hear the voices through (them)... the grounds were very big, there were beautiful coconut palms and it was a delightful atmosphere, far from houses.

"(During the race riots in the mid-1960s) One morning I went to school and there were riots the night before, but I thought it'd quell by then. I arrived in school... there were only six or seven (teachers there) so I was scared to go home. Three or four of the Malay teachers said to me: 'Mrs Desker, if you feel you don't want to go home, you got a place in our houses. We will take you in, you can spend two or three nights until this whole situation is better, then you can go home'. And they said: 'Will you eat any rice?' (I said) 'yes, I'll eat any food you give me'. They had thought that I didn't eat rice, I ate potatoes. I said: 'Whatever gave you the idea?'"

PASIR RIS DURING WORLD WAR II

During the Japanese invasion of Singapore in February 1942, Pasir Ris and the north-eastern area were generally spared the violence and upheaval of other parts in Singapore that saw sustained battles, such as in Kranji, Bukit Timah and Pasir Panjang. As Pasir Ris was not a major population centre or where vital military supplies and equipment were stored, it was also spared the brunt of aerial and artillery bombardments carried out by the Japanese from December 1941, although the Loyang area was bombed, likely because of its Boom Defence Depot.

However, the idyll of Pasir Ris could not escape the shadows of war. Overlooking the north-east entrance to the Johor Strait and Serangoon Harbour, Pasir Ris and Loyang held strategic importance. If the main thrust of an assault on Singapore was to come by sea, as colonial authorities expected, this approach to the strait had to be defended. This importance only grew from the 1920s, when the Naval Base was being developed further down the strait at Sembawang. However, the expectations of a sea-borne assault did not come to pass.

During the Japanese Occupation from 1942 to 1945, the population had to cope with intimidation and brutality from Japanese soldiers, as well as conditions of deprivation and food shortages. In Pasir Ris, people found refuge in the holiday bungalows and mansions of the area, if they were lucky enough to be friends or extended family of the owners. Pooling resources and labour, they made use of agricultural lands here to grow vegetables, tapioca and sweet potatoes, which were in short supply across much of Singapore.

Despite the refuge people found in Pasir Ris, there were grim reminders of the fragility of life nearby as the Japanese carried out *sook ching* ("purge through cleansing" in Mandarin) in Punggol and Changi. The overhanging threat of the Japanese military remained constant during these years, with the occupying forces setting up camps along Tampines Road and maintaining prisoner-of-war camps in Loyang and Changi.

DEFENDING THE NORTH-EAST

In the early 20th century, the defence of Singapore had largely been planned on the basis of attacks from the sea, with the overland invasion route through rural Malaya regarded as an impractical strategy until the mid-1930s. The north-eastern coast, including Pasir Ris, was thus seen as a potential point of vulnerability. To prepare for a possible sea-front invasion, a number of military exercises during this period were carried out at Pasir Ris and nearby coastal areas like Punggol.

These war gaming exercises, also known as manoeuvres, involved British troops who were stationed in Singapore and elsewhere in the Straits Settlements, local units such as the Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC) and the Royal Johor Military Force. One such exercise in 1925 saw the SVC engaging with an "enemy" invading brigade, including the Royal Sussex Regiment, which landed at Pasir Ris. The strategy was based on defensive retreat along the Tampines, Bedok and Changi roads to buy time for the main defence line along the Kallang River.

The defence of the north-east became more vital after the 1938 establishment of Sembawang Naval Base, which the British had been developing since 1922. Pasir Ris itself had been one of four sites considered



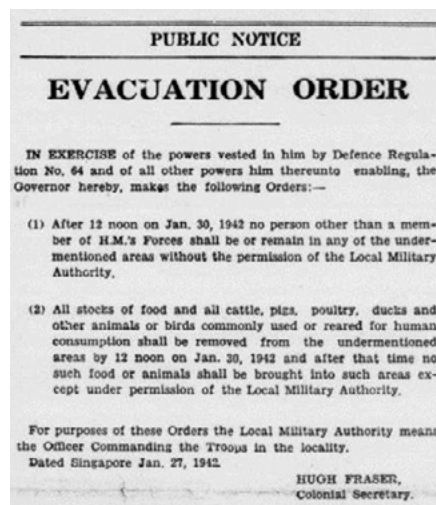
Singapore Volunteer Corps, c. 1942
© IWM (K 672)

for the naval base, along with Senoko, Punggol and Sembawang, but was rejected as it was deemed vulnerable to attack.

As the threat of a Japanese invasion of Malaya and Singapore became more apparent in the 1930s, the colonial authorities' defence plans began to take shape. Artillery batteries at Changi, Pulau Tekong and across the strait at Pengerang in Johor were installed to defend the approach to the Johor Strait. The north coast's defensive installations included electric lights to illuminate the beaches, mines, navy boat patrols along the strait and boom defence efforts by Loyang Boom Defence Depot.

However, these were insufficient as there was a lack of field defences and other types of fixed defences, such as anti-tank and machine gun positions, trenches and mines, which were critical defensive measures. In December 1941, Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Malaya, had rejected proposals for such extensive field defence works as mentioned above

because he feared their negative effects on the morale of soldiers and the civilian population. Nevertheless, Percival reversed his decision later that month and some work began on



Evacuation Order issued by the British authorities, 1942
The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission

defences along the north coast, although these were fragmentary and of limited effect.

Even at this dire juncture, with Japanese troops in control of Johor, the authorities were careful not to alarm the population. The Colonial Secretary issued an evacuation order for the northern coast in January 1942, directing civilian residents of kampongs and villages from Choa Chu Kang in the west to Pasir Ris in the east to leave their homes together with their food stocks and livestock. The move was likely to facilitate seafront defences and also to prevent invading forces from accessing food supplies after landing on the coast. However, the official line on the evacuation stressed that this was a "purely precautionary measure" and "need not cause alarm".

LIFE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

Many people suffered traumas and hardships during the Japanese Occupation between 1942 and 1945, from the *sook ching* executions to persistent food shortages to seizures of property and food by Japanese soldiers. For some, however, the holiday bungalows of Pasir Ris, which were set in an isolated and rural environment, offered refuge from the violence and upheaval in the city. In an account published in *The Straits Times* in 1954, Bebe Yeo recalled her family's experience sheltering at a Pasir Ris mansion owned by a friend:

"The atrocious conduct of Japanese soldiers, who invaded houses, taking whatever they fancied and destroying whatever they disliked, coupled with the looting of local unruly elements, so terrified us that we decided to leave our lonely home in Upper Serangoon for a friend's holiday bungalow at Pasir Ris, where there would be safety in numbers.

"Nearly a hundred relations and dependants lived in this spacious mansion and its numerous outhouses. We were safe from looters here, for the squatters for miles around knew our host. We learned to our dismay that a whole garrison of Japanese soldiers was setting up camp a short distance away... thus we were virtually their prisoners and subjected to unwelcome attentions at all hours of the day.

"During the first week, every time a Japanese soldier called, all the womenfolk rushed to the protective secondary jungle at the back. The frequency of their visits meant that household chores were neglected, time tables hopelessly upset and the state of the house defied description."

Those sheltering at this Pasir Ris bungalow largely escaped violence and the sexual assaults perpetrated by Japanese soldiers elsewhere, although Yeo noted that the fear of the Japanese left girls hiding in false ceilings and in disused wells. The men were also fortunately spared being rounded up to be executed, even though *sook ching* executions were being carried out at the nearby beaches at Punggol and Changi.

She added that despite the atmosphere of fear, some of the refugees ventured out of the bungalows to take leisure strolls along Pasir Ris Beach:

"Despite uneasy minds and heavy hearts, the lure of the sea became irresistible, particularly to the younger members. We found ourselves strolling in twos and threes to the beach, where we bathed, dug clams or just sat around watching the children frolicking in the water. Our eyes surveyed the peaceful wooded outlines of islands in the distant horizon, the lonely kelong, a sprinkling of kolehs (boats) and sampans either putting out to sea or returning. Everything was unbelievably quiet and peaceful."

LOYANG BOOM DEFENCE DEPOT AND LOYANG OFFSHORE SUPPLY BASE

The coastal defences in the north-east included Loyang Boom Defence Depot, which spanned some 20 acres of sea-fronting land to the west of Sungei Loyang and was accessed through Jalan Kuala Loyang off Tampines Road. Boom defence was implemented to deny submarines or other enemy vessels access to the strait by net-laying ships and cordon-forming steel buoys, and also involved mine-sweeping operations.

The depot stored equipment and materials used in the defence of the eastern approach to the Johor Strait, including vessels, defensive nets, mines and chains. The Loyang compound included a reinforced concrete jetty, a slipway for vessels, workshops, warehouses and other buildings. In August 1940, the area around the depot was gazetted as a protected zone under Singapore's Defence Regulations. This barred "enemy aliens" (non-British citizens) and any others who were not residents entry into the area.

In late 1941 and early 1942, colonial authorities recruited civilians to serve in auxiliary roles around the depot. Lee Tian Soo (b. 1925) recalled in an interview with the National Archives of Singapore:

"As a boy scout, when the Japanese started to attack, there was a call for volunteers, and I joined to become a wireless operator. (Loyang) used to be a boom defence, a place where they used to maintain operations to stop submarines (and other vessels) from coming into the Straits of Johor.

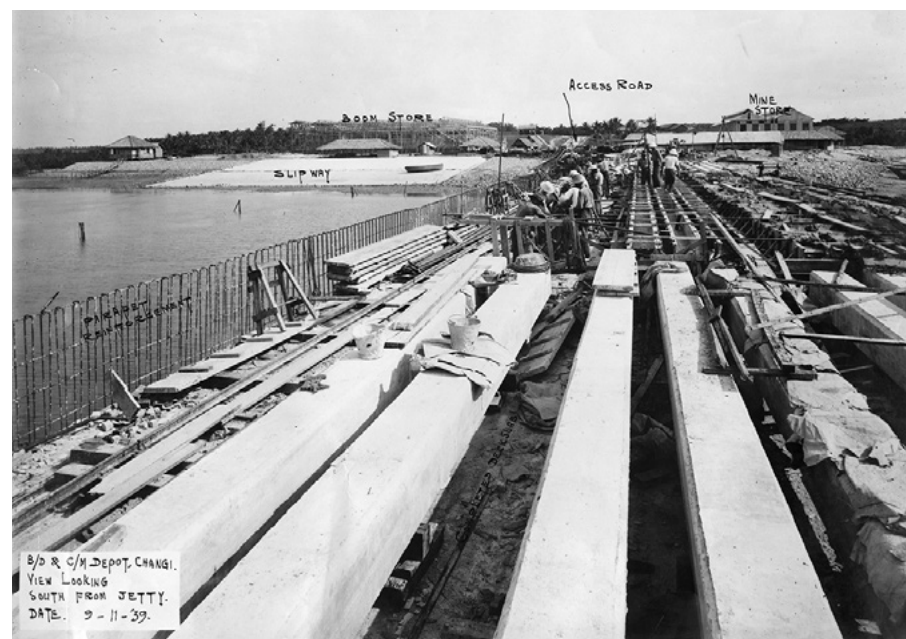
"After that I switched over (to being a) mine watcher. We got to go out (into the sea) in a small launch with three or four people, equipped with a small box with a switch and a compass inside. Our job (was) to detect (mines) - enemy planes may come slowly over the water and they fly low and drop mines. These mines would drift along the water... if any ships (were) in the area, they would be hit.

"As you go far out into the sea, (during the) night time you only can see the search lights (on the coast). Once we hear the air raid sound, we would keep looking... when the mine drops, we can see (and hear) the splash. We take position of the splash based on the compass, and report back to the (base). Then the mine-sweeper will go and survey the area and destroy the mine."

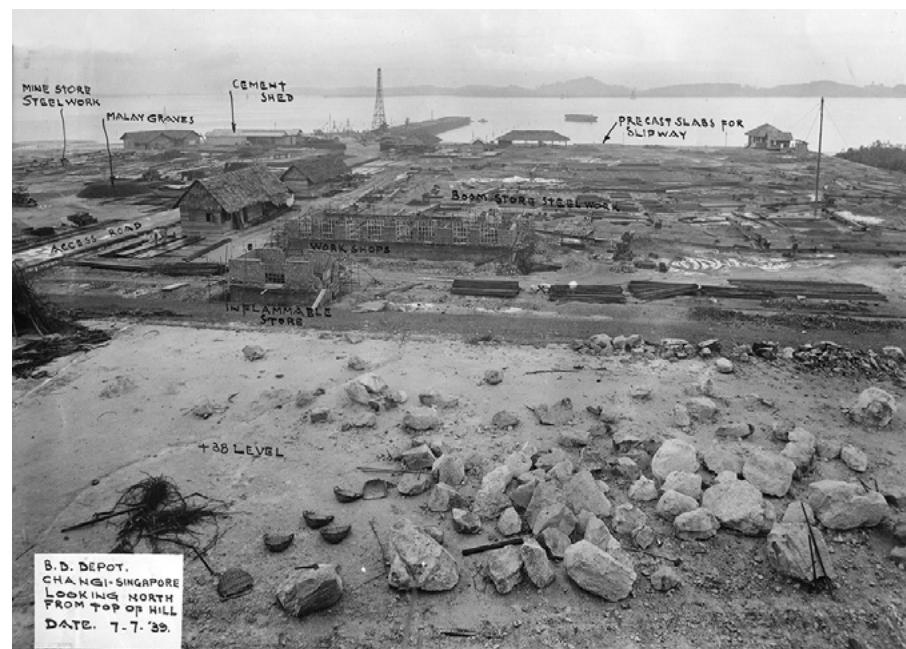
Lee added that the mine-spotting activities stopped when it became clear that the invasion would come overland through Johor. He also noted the Loyang area was patrolled by Indian soldiers, which raised concerns among British officers about local spies giving away



Floats and drums that support the boom nets at the Boom Defence Depot, 1941
© IWM (K 1302)



The jetty at Loyang Boom Defence Depot, 1939
The National Archives, United Kingdom Collection



Loyang Boom Defence Depot, 1939
The National Archives, United Kingdom Collection

information regarding defensive positions, although no such instances were officially recorded.

After the British surrender of Singapore on 15 February 1942, the Loyang depot was taken over by the Imperial Japanese Navy. There were a number of British prisoners-of-war (POW) interned at Loyang, although the POW population at Changi to the east was much larger. Arthur William Bartholomew, a Royal Navy sailor, recounted his experience as a POW at Loyang in an oral history interview:

"We went on working parties (for miscellaneous jobs, such as clearing airfields). And some (would

tend) the garden, like for growing vegetables for the Japs. Another party would go down unloading small ships on the jetty at Loyang, or loading them up with different things. There were all various (jobs), every sort of dockside job.

"In the morning, about 7 o'clock, we had to muster out on the square. And then their Commanding Officer would give a sort of lecture of some sort or the rules of the day, which we didn't understand. And then they bowed to the sun (to the east), we had to do the same. And we were just marched off and told what to do.

"You worked to about 12 noon, (and) if you were lucky, you might get about an hour's rest. Then

you worked on until about 7... then you have your evening meal - rice or fish, or whatever it might have been. I'm sure it was dog we had (on occasion). We used to kill salamanders if we saw one, or snakes (for food). Anything that kept us going."

Bartholomew added that local civilians in the Tampines, Loyang and Changi areas would smuggle food and medicine to the British POWs when possible. He also recalled receiving beatings from Japanese guards whenever the Japanese military faced major setbacks, such as at the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942 and the Battle of Midway the following month.

After the end of World War II and following the return of the British to Singapore, the Loyang depot came under the charge of the Royal Navy again, and added marine salvage to its operations. In 1949, the depot was involved in the construction of a 4.8-kilometre-long defence boom for then British-occupied Hong Kong. The boom was used to protect the western approach to Hong Kong Harbour, stretching from the main island of Hong Kong to Green Island and Stonecutters' Island (a former island in Victoria Harbour) and to the New Territories. The boom helped Hong Kong authorities police the wide western approach to the harbour, and had consisted of more than 350 circular steel



Loyang Offshore Supply Base, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

buoys each weighing 13 tons and 600 smaller 1.5-ton buoys linked by steel hawsers.

The Loyang depot made the news once more the following year, when the yacht Boleh was constructed and tested before its 15,000-mile sail from Singapore to the United Kingdom. Boleh was a 16-ton yacht designed by its owner Commander Robin Kilroy in the form of a dhow, and was constructed using local *chengal* wood by Embong Saleh and Ali Ngah, two Malay shipwrights from Terengganu.

Fitted with an auxiliary engine and with a crew comprising Commander Kilroy, Lieutenant-Commander John Rusher, Lieutenant-Commander Peter Aplin, cook Chang Hai Kun and engineer George Jarvis, Boleh left Singapore on 18 January 1950, sailed across the Indian Ocean and around the Cape of Good Hope, and arrived on Salcombe, Devon in the United Kingdom in September 1950.

With the British government announcing the withdrawal of its military forces and bases from Singapore by 1971, the Loyang depot was converted into a logistics base for companies carrying out offshore oil exploration in the late 1960s. To supply ships exploring and drilling for oil in the region, the Loyang site was expanded and quays, warehouses, water and oil tanks were installed. The logistics base was set up by American oil drilling company Santa Fe-Pomeroy in 1968, and the government took a controlling stake in the base through investments by Development Bank of Singapore and Economic Development Board in 1970.

Run by the Singapore Offshore Petroleum Services company, the Loyang base had attracted some 40 oil exploration and supply companies by the late 1970s, providing logistics services and supplies to oil rigs in offshore Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. Hwang Peng Yuan, who was deputy director at the Economic

Development Board (EDB) in the 1960s, recalled that the conversion of the base came at an opportune time for newly independent Singapore:

"All of a sudden, there appeared in Singapore a number of very strange people, they wore cowboy hats and cowboy boots, mostly from Texas. They were oil people and they said they had got concessions to drill in Indonesia and they needed a base for the supply boats and so on. I had a meeting with them in EDB's (small meeting room)... we were very responsive. By that time I had seen all the bases (that the British military were vacating) and I (thought of) Loyang. They had services, they had ramps and so on for small boats. Eventually Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) was to build a new base in Jurong, but meanwhile they could use the (former) Boom Defence Depot. And that's why we became the second oil rig capital in the world after Houston."

"(Because of the Loyang base), we learned to build tugboats and then all the rig builders came until at one time in Singapore we were producing nearly 50 per cent of oil rigs in the world. We were a significant force in rig building in the world and that's only because we had the facilities and we made use of (them)... all very opportunistic."

Many youths in Loyang, Pasir Ris and Changi were drawn to temporary jobs when ships docked at the Loyang base. Eugene Wijesingha, who was principal at Changkat Changi Secondary School in the 1970s, remembered:

"Truancy was very high. There were times when entire classes of male pupils would be absent from school. We knew that a ship had berthed at Loyang. The ship was being cleaned perhaps and these people went there for part-time jobs. In two weeks' time the ship left. Then they would be back in school."

The site of the former Boom Defence Depot is now occupied by Loyang Offshore Supply Base, Police Coast Guard Loyang Regional Base and forms part of the Loyang Industrial Estate.

POST-WAR DEVELOPMENTS

For much of the colonial period, the sea breeze, the view over the placid Strait of Johor and the beaches had largely been available only to elite landowners, guests that they invited and allowed into their bungalows as well as groups who made the journey out to Pasir Ris. From the 1950s, however, entrepreneurs and the government began to take notice of the commercial potential of the Pasir Ris coast, building attractions and infrastructure that began to make the area more accessible.

PASIR RIS HOTEL

One of the first private developments at the beach was Pasir Ris Hotel, which opened in May 1952 after the renovation and conversion of tycoon Joseph Aaron Elias' two-storied bungalow. The mansion and part of the estate had been acquired by hotelier Ho Meng Quee after Elias' death in 1949, and was redeveloped

into a hotel and seaside resort at a cost of some \$250,000. Part of this investment went into reconstructing a section of Elias Road, which branched off from the 10½ milestone of Tampines Road and led to the hotel as well as Kampong Pasir Ris to the west. Sections of Elias Road however remained as laterite tracks into the 1970s.

At its opening, the sea-fronting Pasir Ris Hotel had 35 rooms, an open-air dance hall, as well as a restaurant and bar, which operated until midnight daily and was billed in advertisements as "the ideal seaside resort" where patrons can "dine in our moonlight court by the sea". Ho, who also owned White House Hotel in Jalan Besar, banked on the beach and its bucolic rural surrounds, as well as recreational activities such as tennis, swimming and boating to draw customers to his hotel.



Pasir Ris Hotel, which was formerly Joseph Aaron Elias's bungalow, 1962
Courtesy of Singas.co.uk



Hotel guests swimming and canoeing at Pasir Ris Hotel's private beach, 1967
Courtesy of Singas.co.uk

Despite being one of the attractions, the hotel's reclusive surrounds also became a challenge for the hotelier as Pasir Ris did not have established telephone lines then, and would-be guests had to call Ho's Jalan Besar hotel to book a room in Pasir Ris instead. This inconvenient arrangement lasted until Singapore Telephone Board installed a radio telephone at the hotel in 1959, finally connecting Pasir Ris to the local network. However, each radio telephone was said to cost around \$8,000 and the hotel had to charge users 20 cents per call.

In 1956, with its proprietor Ho Meng Quee facing legal troubles after being charged with making a false declaration, the ownership and management of Pasir Ris Hotel was transferred to his wife, Jessie Ho Teck Fong. The hotel then became a transit hostel administered by the Royal Air Force (RAF)'s Far East Air Force headquarters in January 1959, with RAF personnel and their families staying at the hotel while awaiting for more permanent residences. The hotel's dining hall and bar were reserved for RAF use, although

the public could still eat and drink at the verandah. Public booking of the hotel was also closed during this period until 1966 when the RAF arrangement ended.

In an oral history account, American Jon Metes (b. 1936) remembered the extended drives to reach Pasir Ris Hotel with his wife Helen:

"When Helen and I married, we used to go to Pasir Ris. In those days, it was an expedition. You'd go up Upper Serangoon Road to Tampines Road, you go around the end of the Paya Lebar (Airport) runaway, until you got to Elias Road. You would go in to Elias Road and wind through sand dunes, and then you get down and there was this old hotel - it was like a huge bungalow that apparently had specialised in putting up transient British military people.

"They had a series of rooms like (in) terraced houses, very small rooms, must have been 10-12 rooms right along the beach, and there was a jetty going out with a room at the end of the jetty. We spent our honeymoon night there, so we got eaten up by mosquitoes. The beach was no wider than the width of this room, a muddy beach, (not much

white sand). But it was private, it was clean, it was alright. You could go swimming, have a picnic if you wanted. We took our dogs there - pack the dogs in the car, take some makan, or you could eat there.

Although the hotel reopened for bookings from 1966, the years of exclusive use by the RAF had lessened its appeal as a tourist destination. In 1971, a newspaper report noted that the hotel "apparently never regained its former popularity" and was "virtually deserted" during the week. By 1976, the hotel and land around it had been acquired by property developer Kong Joo Private Limited and renamed Pasir Ris Beach Hotel. The company also built the bungalows, semi-detached and terraced houses that stand in Pasir Ris Beach Park Estate today (more details on the estate can be found on p. 46).

In October 1976, Kong Joo announced plans to expand the hotel's capacity to more than 300 rooms and develop a four-storey complex with a shopping arcade, restaurants and a nightclub. These plans were calculated to draw transit passengers from the nearby Changi Airport but never came to fruition. In the 1980s, the hotel's business was said to come mainly from locals on weekend stays, with room rates ranging from \$32 to \$50.

The end for the hotel came in 1983, after it was announced in January that year that the government would acquire some 120,000 square metres of land including the hotel's site to develop a seaside resort and park. The hotel formally closed on the last day of 1983, having operated for the latter half of the year on a skeleton crew of 11, compared to the normal workforce of 29 employees. Robin Tan, the assistant front manager, recalled:

"I remember coming to this place when I was a little boy and seeing only ang mohs (Caucasians) around. It was very exclusive, somewhat like the Singapore Cricket Club. And the sea came right up to the hotel's doorsteps... It is so sad after so many years working here and the many memories of the place and people, it is all going to end so quietly."

WATERSKIING AT PASIR RIS

In February 1955, Pasir Ris Hotel hosted what was billed as the first major waterski competition in Singapore. While the Malayan Water Ski Association had organised smaller events at Loyang previously, the competition at Pasir Ris was the first in which a spectator crowd was catered for. The event saw female and male competitors perform slalom courses where they had to navigate a series of buoys in a zig-zag fashion, and execute flying jumps off a 30-foot-long wooden ramp, with points awarded for distance and style.

The water-skier judged to have delivered the best all-round performance in 1955 was Dutch count Hugo van Zuylen van Nijevelt, who also won the men's open slalom. The 1955 event at Pasir Ris also saw water-skiers, hailing from clubs such as Supersonic, Johor and Ski-Speeder, perform trick moves in a novelty event. A second competition in June that year was opened by Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia.

Until the 1960s, waterskiing events continued to be held at Pasir Ris and Loyang, although little was heard from the Malayan Water Ski Association after Singapore's independence in 1965. In 1975, the Singapore Waterski & Wakeboard Federation was registered, and the federation organised waterskiing events at other locations such as Coney Island and Punggol.

PASIR RIS BEACH

Pasir Ris Park

Despite its island nature and tropical climate, Singapore beaches never approached the fame achieved by some of its Southeast Asian neighbours. By the late 1940s, one newspaper report lamented that "Singapore island itself has never been a tourist attraction. Beaches are few and far between and usually dirty." Another report in 1953 was of the opinion that "for an island (Singapore) is quite



Pasir Ris Beach, 1958
The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission

extraordinarily poor in its access to unspoilt stretches of seacoast, and what there is has been, to a terrible extent, gobbled up by (military) service departments getting ready for (World War II)... the Air Force has spoilt a great deal of the country around Changi."

One of those that was regarded as being among "the only beaches left for a pleasant swim" however was Pasir Ris, along with beaches in neighbouring Changi and Punggol. However, there were precious few public facilities like changing rooms, shelters, and food and drink outlets at these beaches, and access to these areas largely wound through rural districts and poor roads. Other than the wealthy who owned bungalows and their private slices of beach, those who were able to reach Pasir Ris were mainly groups from social clubs, educational institutions, scouting bands, unions and the like.

For individuals, families and youths, just travelling to Pasir Ris beach required considerable effort. Tan Gee Paw (b. 1943), an engineer who became chairman of Public Utilities Board, was one of those youths who made the effort to get to the beach in the 1950s:



Pasir Ris Beach, 1958
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

"(During the school holidays), a few of us would agree that we'll meet on a certain date at a certain time at a certain bus stop. And one of them will have a tent, we'd board the bus and go off to Punggol, Serangoon, Pasir Ris, (those areas). In those days, nobody stops you... nobody tells you where you cannot camp. You just walk around, and you see a nice spot along the beach, coconut trees and some lalang grass, you clear a little bit of it and pitch a tent. We would only go home when after a lot of rain and dew, the tent's roof (was) so saggy (that) you got to crawl inside.

"Going home was a big problem. Because you carry all the pots, pans, tents and poles and all that, you wait for the bus to come and the bus drivers, when they see you with all these things, they won't stop, they'll just drive straight on. In those days, buses (were) few and far apart... finally we decided one boy will stand at the bus stop. The rest, with all our things, would hide far away. When the bus stopped, everybody comes running out, pans, pots, (and) board the bus."

The post-war period saw increasing calls for the municipal authorities to expand Singapore's recreational offerings, including the development of public amenities at beaches. The government-appointed Playing Fields Committee estimated in 1951 that the urban population of around 700,000 people in Singapore had less than 250 acres of sporting and recreational spaces available to them. There was also a fear that if beaches were not developed and designated for public use, private homeowners and businesses would come and dominate every available piece of seafront, much as they had along the east coast from Kallang to Bedok.

In 1952, the government established a Beach Development Committee to investigate potential public beaches. The committee comprised Legislative Councillors Thio Chan Bee and Andrew McLellan, Chin Chye Fong, a member of the Rural Board, as well as City Councillors Phyllis Eu Cheng Li and Amy Laycock. The early remarks made by Thio, the committee's chairman, on the state of Singapore's beaches were scathing: "The people who go to the beaches have to endure many discomforts and inconveniences, such as changing behind bushes or in lorries and cars, lack of privacy and fresh water for bathing after a swim and no proper shelter from sun or rain."

Thio added that the few itinerant hawkers on the beaches were operating under insanitary conditions, and the existing huts and shelters set up by entrepreneurs were hired out at exorbitant rates despite their "disgusting"

conditions. Calling for the urgent development of public amenities and facilities, he reasoned that "more and better beach resorts will mean good health for the people, and they are preventive measures against tuberculosis and other illness". Beyond changing rooms and shelters, Thio also urged the development of sewage and drainage systems for residences around beaches so that waste would not be discharged into the sea near beaches.

In its report, which was tabled before the Legislative Council at the end of 1952, the committee recommended the development of Changi Beach as its priority, followed by beaches at Pasir Ris and Bedok. The section of beach near Pasir Ris Hotel was deemed to be the most suitable for development, as it was already popular with visitors and the water was reasonably clear.

Having voted through a budget of \$1 million for the Changi works in 1953, the Legislative Council later approved some \$345,000 for the Pasir Ris and Bedok scheme, which entailed the acquisition of some 14 acres of land at Pasir Ris, and the construction of changing rooms, hawker stalls and public lavatories. The development programme came under the Singapore Rural Board, with design and construction works undertaken by the Public Works Department. The final bill for the Pasir Ris development came in at \$200,000, although the Rural Board did not follow all the recommendations made by the Beach Development Committee.

By the time Pasir Ris Beach was developed in 1958, Singapore had edged closer to self-government, with the Legislative Council replaced by the Legislative Assembly. Only one Legislative Councillor had been voted into the new Assembly, the Labour Front's Lim Yew Hock, and it was in his role as Chief Minister that Lim opened Pasir Ris Beach on 17 August 1958. The former trade union leader had asserted the previous year that "one of the big changes in Singapore is that the weekend has become everybody's right,

and it is our duty to see that the worker as well as the employer has his opportunities for recreation”.

After firing a flare gun to declare the beach's resort facilities officially open, Lim said that the development aligned with the government's community recreation plan, which sought to maximise the use of recreational facilities by the public. American consultant S. S. Winans arrived to direct the government programme, in which vacant land, schools and playing fields would be made open for communal use. Places like Pasir Ris Beach would be vital in public health and wellbeing, with Lim adding: “It is our hope that we shall succeed in channelling youthful energies into healthy, creative and worthwhile activities and thus build up healthy, disciplined and active young men and women. It is they who are the material from which we shall build the new State of Singapore.”

The amenities helped increase the number of visitors to the already popular Pasir Ris Beach, and large groups from government agencies,

unions, community clubs and others held events here. For example, in September 1958, the Singapore City Council brought some 5,000 employees and their families to the beach to commemorate City Day. The event included beach and sea sports, children's games and an open-air concert.

Despite the occasional oil slick and other pollution issues over the decades, the beach has remained an accessible, well-liked spot for recreation, as Jamilah binte Abdul Salam (b. 1961) remembers:

“We used to go to the beach to catch shrimp to make cincalok (a fermented shrimp sauce) and belachan (fermented shrimp paste). We would make them for (the family) to eat and also to sell to our neighbours (in Kampong Loyang).

“Even as the town changed and we moved out, (and later) back into Pasir Ris, we still go to the beach very often for family outings. Our father used to own a boat and we would use the boat to go out to fish. We would also camp at the beach even though we lived nearby.”



Golden Palace Holiday Resort, 1970s
Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

FORMER GOLDEN PALACE HOLIDAY RESORT

Seeking to capitalise on efforts to promote Singapore as a major tourist destination in the mid-1960s, entrepreneurs gambled on floating restaurants, small resorts and other tourist attractions. One such establishment was Golden Palace Holiday Resort, which opened in 1967 on Jalan Ang Siang Kong off the 1½ milestone along Tampines Road. The 11-acre resort counted among its offerings a nightclub, restaurants and snack bars, and a former sand quarry turned into a fishing and boating pond. Guests could stay in a motel or in chalets that overlooked the pond, which had Chinese-style pavilions and walkways lined with colourful lights.

In its heyday, Golden Palace's restaurants served Shanghaiese, Malay and Cantonese cuisine, while the nightclub featured performers like local singer Judy Chin and Indonesian pianist Moeljono Waneng Sworo. Families were drawn to the leisurely fishing and boating activities, while the nightclub and restaurants attracted patrons in the evening especially during the weekends.

However, those heydays were short and business eventually dwindled, leading to a dispute between the resort's directors. In April 1971, one of the directors successfully obtained a winding-up order against the company operating the resort, Golden Palace Pte Ltd. He alleged that the company mismanaged



Guests taking boat rides at the Golden Palace Holiday Resort, 1971
The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission

its finances and failed to produce proper accounts. The resort was put up for auction and by December 1971, the restaurants were operating with a skeleton crew.

The resort failed secure buyers until March 1973, when it was acquired by the government for a price of \$870,000. The Primary Production Department (now part of Singapore Food Agency) took over the site and converted it into a research and demonstration station, breeding popular seafood such as *udang galah* (giant freshwater prawn) and *soon hock* (marble goby). The experiments carried out here were tailored towards maximising commercial production, and cultivation methods were passed on to fish farm operators to grow the industry.

FORMER PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION HOLIDAY CAMP AND HOLIDAY FLATS

101 Elias Road



Then Minister for Culture and Social Affairs Othman Wok at a picnic for the residents of social welfare homes at Pasir Ris Holiday Camp, 1967

Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Then Minister for Environment Lim Kim San touring the Holiday Flats at Pasir Ris, 1973

Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Pasir Ris Sea Sports Centre (now PAssion WaVe @ Pasir Ris), undated
Courtesy of PAssion WaVe @ Pasir Ris

The construction of amenities at Pasir Ris continued in the 1960s and 1970s, as Singapore transitioned from a self-governing country to a federation with Malaysia and finally to an independent nation in 1965. The People's Association (PA), formed in 1960 to strengthen ties between communities through social, cultural and recreational activities, was one agency that developed facilities and organised programmes at Pasir Ris.

In the 1960s, PA built holiday camps at Kranji, Kampong Tengah, Telok Irau and Pasir Ris among others. These camps were aimed at meeting the recreational needs of Singaporeans, which was seen as a key social objective for the government alongside other priorities such as jobs, education and housing. In this respect, as articulated by then Acting Minister for Labour Ong Pang Boon in 1962, the government also sought to safeguard and reserve beach spaces for public use and build amenities for the average Singaporean.

The PA Holiday Camp at Pasir Ris was opened in 1963 before undergoing a refurbishment in 1968. When it reopened that year, the camp had accommodations



Dinghies rented from Pasir Ris Sea Sports Centre sailing on the waterfront, 1992
People's Association Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

for 40 people, split into dormitories for females and males. The camp also included a meeting hall that could take in parties of up to 400 people, thus becoming a popular venue for events such as youth leadership programmes, picnics and parties.

PA also ran camps at Pasir Ris where youths could learn canoeing, orienteering, camp-craft and first aid. The area was particularly suited to sea sports as it overlooked the Strait of Johor and the nearby Pulau Ubin and Coney Island. The early 1970s were also a time when Singaporeans were increasingly turning to the



The former PA Holiday Flats, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

sea for recreational activities, with families getting more affluent and seeking leisure options like power-boating, diving, sailing and waterskiing. Community bodies, sporting and social clubs, and statutory bodies like PA began organising competitions, learning courses and camps.

In the 1960s, the popularity of recreational activities at Pasir Ris had decreased as the sea became polluted. The pollution was caused by increased traffic in the Johor Strait, comprising mainly ships going to and from the naval base at Sembawang, a proliferation of pig farms at nearby Punggol and the operations of shipyards at Loyang and Changi. The situation changed in the 1980s and the water at Pasir Ris began to clear, as the pig farms were removed and the British military had withdrawn from Singapore the previous decade.

Expanding from the camps run by PA in the 1960s, Pasir Ris Sea Sports Centre was established in 1987 and specialised in sailing and canoeing. Now named PAssion WaVe @ Pasir Ris, the centre offers kayaking, dinghy sailing, abseiling and sport climbing, with the relatively calm waters of the strait said to be

ideal for beginners to learn Laser and Laser Pico sailing.

With the increased popularity of Pasir Ris as a leisure destination, there was a need for affordable vacation spaces in the area. In 1969, PA began the construction of 30 flats on a five-acre plot of land overlooking Pasir Ris Beach. The rationale for building the flats was, as its development supervisor Kenneth Toh explained, to provide holiday residences and "encourage healthy forms of relaxation for a wider sector of the public, at a cost the average wage-earner can afford. The flats will fulfil a long-felt need of the average man. Until now, he has had nowhere to stay if he wants to take his family to the seaside for a week."

Consisting of 18 three-room units and 12 two-room units in a three-storey block, the PA Holiday Flats were officially declared open by then Environment Minister Lim Kim San in November 1973, and were made available for public bookings with priority given to members of grassroots organisations and PA. At its opening, a three-room unit cost \$10 to rent per day while a two-room flat was \$7.

VILLA SAUJANA AND DARI LAUT

Perhaps due to its proximity to Changi, with its military bases and large population of foreigners, Loyang was the location of one of the earliest tourist attractions in the area. In 1965, Englishman Ernest Smith, a former assistant manager at Raffles Hotel, began hosting tourists at his house in Kampong Loyang. These parties eventually developed into Villa Saujana, a two-acre dining and entertainment village where tourists and visitors could have Malay cuisine while enjoying a dance performance at the same time.

By 1974, Villa Saujana received tourists in groups of more than 100, who paid \$30 for dinner, drinks and the performance in a kampong setting. Patrons watched local dancers on a stage built on a pier as they were served Malay cuisine in *attap*-roofed, batik-wrapped pavilions overlooking the Strait of Johor. Having initially hired student dancers, Smith later engaged a professional dance troupe, and also took on residents of Kampong Loyang as waiters and other staff. In the 1970s, Villa Saujana was described as one of the top tourist draws in Singapore, but the entertainment village closed in the mid-1980s.

Located nearby was another attraction set up by expatriates, named Dari Laut (“from the sea” in Malay). This museum, displaying sea shells,

coral and a few stuffed examples of fish and other wildlife including a slow loris and a baby python, sat within Johnny Johnson’s Kampong Loyang house. Johnson, a former diver with the Indian Navy who became a painter and entertainer in Singapore, set up Dari Laut with Jack Fisher after both had worked on exhibits in a museum in Kuala Lumpur.

For between \$12 to \$18, visitors could have a dinner comprising local cuisine as well as watch a film and browse the museum’s collection, which featured an extensive display of shells and corals collected by Johnson. Dari Laut was initially mainly patronised by American soldiers on “rest and relaxation” breaks from the Vietnam War, but later opened to other tourists and the public.

After a visit, then Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee was impressed enough to ask Johnson and Fisher to set up a larger museum. This led to the duo’s involvement in the establishment of the Coralarium at Sentosa in 1974. The Coralarium was a four-acre complex with gardens and a building with a 60-metre-long display of corals and seashells, as well as an 18-metre-tall Coralon tower. Amid growing awareness that removing living corals from the sea caused great ecological damage, the Coralarium was closed in 1995 and redeveloped as waterfront housing.

FORMER NTUC PASIR RIS RESORT (NOW DOWNTOWN EAST)

1 Pasir Ris Close

Since the end of World War II, the labour history of Singapore has undergone several major evolutions, from the frequent labour disputes and strikes of the 1950s and 1960s to the tripartite government-union-companies approach that characterised labour relations after independence. For the unions, the early decades revolved around fundamental issues such as job security, wages and working

conditions. However, years of nearly full employment, economic growth and better working terms meant that by the 1980s, fewer people were taking up union memberships. Union officials thus refocused on different aspects of worker welfare to cater to a younger, better-educated and more affluent workforce to maintain union membership.

Speaking in 1987, then National Trades Union Congress (NTUC)’s secretary-general Ong Teng Cheong (who was also Deputy Prime

Minister and later President of Singapore) articulated this need: “The more obvious changes are from fighting for more pay, greater job security and better working conditions, to more training facilities and a more pleasant and healthier living environment.”

In response, the labour movement undertook the development of a holiday resort for the average wage-earner at Pasir Ris. Described as a “country club for workers”, the resort had first been mooted in the late 1970s by the Singapore Labour Foundation (SLF). The SLF had been founded in 1977 to promote the welfare of unionised workers, and was partially funded by their contributions of \$6 per year.

The government also had an interest in the resort as a means of worker welfare, with Ong laying out both government and union perspectives at the 1984 NTUC Ordinary Delegates’ Conference. He said:

“The need for holiday facilities for our workers is that much more urgent and greater as our

society advances and our workers have much better income. Our present senior managerial staff have access to golf clubs and private clubs. We feel that workers deserve to enjoy facilities of equal standard, though not to the same degree of exclusivity.

“For Singapore to continue to progress, it is essential that our workers can unceasingly acquire new skills and continuously give their best. Better skills and higher productivity can be attained by workers who are in good health and of sound mind. Appropriate relaxation and proper recreation will help to ensure we have a healthy and balanced workforce.”

By 1981, the SLF was considering the island of Buran Darat off Sentosa, East Coast Park, St. John’s Island and Pasir Ris as potential sites for the resort. The island sites were eventually ruled out due to prohibitive logistics and operations costs. A 16.8-hectare site in Pasir Ris, adjacent to the People’s Association Holiday Camp, was announced as the chosen location later that year. The government-



Guests and their families having dinner during NTUC Pasir Ris Resort, 1988
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



NTUC Pasir Ris Resort, 1994
Courtesy of NTUC Club

owned land had been allocated to SLF at a nominal fee, which meant major cost savings for the labour movement.

Nevertheless, SLF was in need of funds to build the resort, which was projected at that time to include some 80 chalets, campgrounds, canteens and sports facilities. A committee with representatives from SLF and NTUC was set up to raise funds, with companies linked to both organisations, such as NTUC Comfort, Fairprice and Vicom pledging multi-million-dollar contributions. Other corporations including Post Office Savings Bank, National Iron and Steel, and Neptune Orient were also donors, as were smaller unions such as the Public Daily-Rated Nightsoil Employees' Union and the Singapore Maritime Officers' Union.

The SLF set up a company, Pasir Ris Resort Pte Ltd, to establish and run the resort. The company was chaired by veteran urban planner and architect Alan Choe, who was also deputy chairman of then Singapore Tourist

Promotion Board and a board member of Sentosa Development Corporation. From the start, the resort's affordability was a key consideration. The SLF and NTUC had decided to absorb the capital costs of the project and depend on rentals and other charges to meet operations and maintenance costs. These charges had to be priced at a level which would not keep out the average worker, with Ong saying: "It will be a place where you can relax with your family and friends. A resort you can proudly call your own country club at a price you can afford."

Former unionist and Member of Parliament Eric Cheong elaborated on the labour movement's thinking on pricing and financing of the resort in 2004:

"Without (the Pasir Ris resort), where do the average worker and his family go for a short holiday on weekends or a one-day holiday? (If they go to a resort overseas), how much does he have to pay to bring the family to enjoy facilities (like those at Pasir Ris)? Pasir Ris was (our first



The former Escape Theme Park, 2000
Courtesy of NTUC Club

resort) with all the facilities for the family and the rates are very low. To make it affordable, the union subsidises part of it and sometimes companies chip in as company welfarism. To (help) cover the costs, we allow non-members to go in at market rates."

From its early stages, the project was also influenced by the concepts and operations of the Butlin's chain of resorts in the United Kingdom. These seaside resorts and holiday camps, starting with the first founded by entrepreneur Sir Billy Butlin at Skegness in 1936, were pitched at the average worker and were noted for their affordability and range of activities. SLF staff and officials, including Ong, visited the Butlins resort at Bognor Regis to observe operations and study the various leisure concepts offered at resorts. Among the concepts that they eventually implemented at the Pasir Ris resort were to ensure a wide range of sporting and other activities, and that all rooms were equipped with only basic furnishings to encourage guests to partake in outdoor activities instead.



Children enjoying the water at Wild Wild Wet, 2004
Courtesy of NTUC Club

The concepts and architecture of the resort were greatly shaped by then NTUC's secretary-general, Ong. He had trained and practiced as an architect, as well as worked as an urban planner at the Ministry of National Development before joining politics, and took an active hand in the Pasir Ris project. As Choe, the chairman of the company overseeing the resort's development recalled in an oral history interview:

"The real driving force (was) our president Ong Teng Cheong. He (was) an architect-planner like myself, and I was very fortunate and honoured to be selected by him to chair the board, to implement the project. It was quite easy for me as an architect to complement his ideas (and ensure that they were) carried out smoothly, speedily. Sometimes, (I modified) ideas of his and (brought about) a better mix to get it into a real tourist resort."

In 1986, it was decided that the resort would shift from its location near Pasir Ris Beach to a new 14.7-hectare site, where it stands today. Explaining the move, Ong said that government plans for the land adjacent to the old site would reduce the appeal of the resort, and that the new site was closer to a proposed Mass Rapid Transit station.

The NTUC Pasir Ris Resort opened its doors to the public on 12 September 1988, before being officially declared open by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on 29 October that year. At that time, the resort had 396 rooms within chalets and apartment blocks, and its amenities included an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a wading pool with animal-themed slides, a café, a restaurant, a sauna, squash and tennis courts, an arcade games room, an amusement park, childcare facilities and the Monsoon discotheque.

During the resort's early days, the public paid off-peak rates of \$50 and peak rates of \$60 respectively per day for a chalet, with discounts for NTUC members. The rooms were furnished in a basic manner to draw people to the activities outside - televisions and video-cassette recorders were available for rental, and only the first eight hours of air-conditioning was free, with subsequent use charged at 25 cents per hour.

The resort's staff organised activities such as karaoke sessions, games, tea dances in the disco, fashion shows, sports such as waterpolo, as well as more leisurely diversions such as bingo, poolside barbecues and magic shows. Taking a mainly family-

oriented approach, the resort also had coin-operated arcade games machines and bumper car rides for children, and a jackpot room for adults. In its early years, the resort was managed by MSI Hospitality Services, a company linked to Mandarin Singapore Hotel, before NTUC began to manage the resort themselves.

The resort was renamed Downtown East in 2000 and its ownership came under NTUC Club in 2004. Over the years, the resort has expanded and added new recreational amenities, including a bowling alley and theme parks. The 3.3-hectare Escape Theme Park was opened in 2000 and developed in partnership with Toei Animation of Japan. Its rides included the log-boat themed Flume Ride, the Mad Mouse rollercoaster, Grand Prix-themed go karts and pirate ships, a ferris wheel and fighter lane simulations.

However, a series of accidents and injuries to patrons contributed to a declining visitorship at the resort, and the management closed some rides and instituted safety controls, before Escape Theme Park was eventually closed in 2011. Wild Wild Wet, opened in 2004, was another theme park within the resort. The water-based park included a 10-metre-tall ride that simulated white-water rafting, named Ular-lah, and the Sidewinder, a float-based ride based on adventure sports.

The mid-2000s saw the completion of E! Hub, a mall with food outlets, a cinema, a bowling centre and a nightclub within the resort. After a revamp in 2012, the resort section was redeveloped into D'Resort @ Downtown East, a nature-themed holiday complex. The Wild Wild Wet theme park was also expanded, and meetings and events spaces were added along with a market square.

After two decades, affordability still remains a core objective, with then NTUC Club Chief Executive Officer Lim Eng Lee saying:

"Downtown East remains committed to our mission to ensure leisure choices remain

affordable for our members. We don't try to bring in expensive things here, but having said that, we also want quality. Visiting Pasir Ris resort is a rite of passage for every Singaporean. I dare say that practically every Singaporean has passed through this place at least once in their lifetime, regardless of their income level."

OTHER VACATION STAYS: CHALETS, RESORTS AND BUNGALOWS

In the 1970s and 1980s, government agencies, statutory boards and companies developed holiday bungalows and other residences for staff at Pasir Ris and Loyang. With such places of retreat becoming increasingly popular as a form of staff welfare during this period, the Pasir Ris houses provided an alternative to statutory boards which had their former holiday bungalows at Changi cleared to make way for Changi Airport.

In 1975, Telecommunications Authority of Singapore, popularly known as Telecoms, built eight chalets at Pasir Ris next to the PA Holiday Flats complex, which were made

available to Telecoms staff at subsidised rates. The chalet complex, which includes the terrazzo-tiled Elephant Playground, is now run by a private operator. Housing and Urban Development Company (HUDC) also sold 16 two-storey houses in the Pasir Ris Beach Park Estate to statutory boards for use as holiday bungalows. These houses, which sat on plots of land ranging from 743 square metres to 816 square metres, were within a stone's throw of Pasir Ris Beach.



Elephant playground within the former Telecoms chalet complex, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



Holiday chalets built by the former Telecoms, 1987
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

In 1984, 37 bungalows and terraced houses were developed on Jalan Loyang Besar as new holiday homes for civil servants, replacing older ones at Pasir Panjang and Tanah Merah. Sitting off what is today the eastern end of Pasir Ris Park, this holiday complex included gardens, a playground, a swimming pool and tennis and squash courts. The complex was renamed Aloha Loyang Resort in the early 2000s, and served as a quarantine centre during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and H1N1 epidemics in 2003 and 2009 respectively. It is now known as Civil Service Club (CSC) @ Loyang.

Another cluster of chalets was established by HUDC, which had been renamed Urban Development and Management Company (UDMC) in 1982. The UDMC chalets were built on a 3.45-hectare site on Jalan Loyang Besar in 1987. The complex included 186 single-storey and two-storey chalets, and was within walking distance of the beach at Loyang. The complex's amenities included a swimming pool, a multi-purpose hall, a restaurant and shops.

The UDMC chalets provided the holidaying public with an alternative to chalets at East Coast Park, which were said to have a waiting period of up to three months in the 1980s. While the chalets were open to bookings from the public, companies and statutory boards also took up term leases on chalets for their staff to use. Renamed Costa Sands Resort (Pasir Ris) in the early 2000s, the complex was later privatised and is now under the management of Cherryloft Resorts and Hotels.

By the late 1980s, the resorts, holiday residences and camps drew large crowds to Pasir Ris, especially on weekends, and caused a number of issues for residents of the area. Traffic jams, beaches crammed with vacationers and illegal parking were the main problems, and the lack of pedestrian pavements on the rural roads of the area exacerbated headaches for residents of estates such as Pasir Ris Beach Park. The president of that estate's residents' association said in 1988 that people who lived there ironically had to flee to beaches in Desaru and Johor Bahru to escape the crowds.



The elevated pool at Costa Sands Resort (Pasir Ris), 2002
Courtesy of NTUC Club

PASIR RIS TOWN



An aerial view of Pasir Ris Town from the Johor Strait, 2014
Courtesy of the Housing & Development Board

DEVELOPING A TOWN

From the early 1800s to the post-World War II period, the kampongs and villages of Pasir Ris, like others throughout Singapore, had developed organically. It was only from the late 1950s, when Singapore was starting to leave its past as a British colony behind and look toward the future, that planned, large-scale residential developments became more common.

In the 1958 Master Plan, Singapore's first comprehensive urban planning blueprint, a large part of Pasir Ris was zoned for agriculture. These zones included almost the entire western portion of Pasir Ris, from Sungei Serangoon to Kampong Pasir Ris, the Sungei Tampines area and land south of Kampong Loyang.

The Master Plan did not specify new residential developments in Pasir Ris, but made provision for the improvement of rural infrastructure in Kampong Pasir Ris, Pasir Ris Village,

Kampong Tampines and Kampong Loyang. It was envisioned that better infrastructure would help expand the residential capacity of these kampongs, as the Master Plan forecast a trebling of Singapore's rural population from 203,000 by the 1970s. The urban planners also sought government acquisition of land in Pasir Ris, Bedok, Tanah Merah and Changi to develop public recreational spaces.

In the 1960s, the infrastructure projects in Pasir Ris included the reclamation of swamp land, the construction of bridges and the improvement of rural roads, all of which helped improve the quality of life in the area and expand its residential capacity. A major project, carried out in 1960, involved the construction of canals, embankments and tidal gates at Sungei Api Api, as well as the widening of the river. These works helped alleviate the frequent floods that threatened farms in the area after periods of heavy rainfall (more on Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines can be found on p. 51).

PASIR RIS BEACH PARK ESTATE

Developed in the 1970s, Pasir Ris Beach Park Estate was an early step towards large-scale residential estates in the north-east. These terraced, semi-detached and bungalow houses sit on land that had been part of Joseph Aaron Elias' vast estate, which was purchased by property developer Kong Joo in the 1960s. A newspaper report in 1975 had somewhat unfairly described this 57-hectare plot of land as a "vast stretch of seafront wasteland" when much of it was actually largely coconut plantations and aquaculture ponds.

Kong Joo developed a residential estate and targeted middle-income property buyers in the early 1970s. The first phase of development, including two-storey semi-detached houses that went for \$80,000, was a commercial success with all 121 residences sold quickly. The second phase of 207 houses saw a rise in

prices, with bungalows priced from \$285,000 to \$350,000, semi-detached houses from \$180,000 to \$185,000 and terraced houses costing between \$120,000 and \$170,000.

However, the launch of the second phase came at an inopportune time for the developer as the property market was entering a slump in 1974 due to a confluence of factors including government legislation to deter property speculation and inflation from global oil prices. Most of the second phase houses remained unsold until December 1977, when Housing & Urban Development Company (HUDC) purchased some 100 residences from Kong Joo to resell to the public and for use as holiday bungalows. HUDC was formed in 1974 as a subsidiary company under the Ministry of Development's MND Holdings and was best known for developing flats for the middle-income.



An aerial view showing Pasir Ris Beach Park Estate and other residential developments, 2014
Courtesy of the Housing & Development Board

HUDC offered these houses for sale in 1978, with applicants allowed to use their Central Provident Fund savings for purchases. Sold on a 99-year leasehold basis, terraced houses were priced between \$85,000 and \$91,400, while semi-detached houses cost \$120,000. HUDC also sold some two-storey houses, priced around \$160,000, to statutory boards to be used as holiday bungalows for staff (more on these holiday bungalows can be found on p. 43).

Like the villages in the area that preceded it, Pasir Ris Beach Park Estate maintained the neighbourliness and cooperative culture characteristic of kampong days. In the 1980s, residents of the estate often went fishing and boating at Pasir Ris Beach, catching prawns and turning out home-made *belacan* (fermented shrimp paste) and *cincaok* (a condiment made from shrimps, shallots and lime juice), which were shared at pot-luck parties at the beach. At the time, buses only operated near the estate on Sundays and public holidays, and neighbours car-pooled for trips to Tampines and shared marketing runs. After a spate of burglaries in the late 1980s, residents also banded together to form watch groups and institute security measures.

THE BUILDING OF PASIR RIS TOWN

Pasir Ris was earmarked for low-density residential use in the 1971 Concept Plan, which paved the way for a residential town, although planning and development of public housing only began in the early 1980s. Pasir Ris Town was announced as part of the Housing & Development Board's (HDB) sixth Five-Year Building Programme, which covered the years 1986 to 1990 and included public housing estates at Bishan, Bukit Batok, Choa Chu Kang, Simei and Tampines. At the time, Pasir Ris Town was envisioned as a seaside town with the boundaries of Lorong Halus in the west, Sungei Loyang in the east and the former Tampines Road in the south, and a projected capacity of about 40,000 flats.

In preparation for the development of the town, the government began acquiring privately-owned land in 1983. That year, some 954,000 square metres of land in Pasir Ris was gazetted for acquisition, with nearly half of it belonging to Bukit Sembawang Rubber Company. The following year saw the acquisition of another 1.32 million square metres from landowners including Lee Rubber Company. The resettlement of kampong and village residents in Pasir Ris began in 1983, with the first group comprising 146 households.

The additional land space required for Pasir Ris Town was also created through land reclamation, although the bulk of reclamation here was for Pasir Ris Park and institutional uses rather than for public housing. Some 44 hectares of land was reclaimed for the park by 1980, and a series of headland breakwaters constructed to protect against coastal erosion and to facilitate the formation of sandy beaches.

The HDB also carried out a project to treat and dispose of silt and slurry-filled former sand quarries in Pasir Ris, as was done previously in neighbouring Tampines. These former quarries were described as "devastated" areas and required treatment and filling in as part of the project with an estimated cost of \$79 million, before the town's development could begin. The North-East Coast Reclamation Scheme, which was approved in 1984 and stretched from the Sungei Serangoon area to Punggol, also involved part of Pasir Ris.

A key feature in the planning of Pasir Ris Town was connectivity with the town's recreational spaces and the coastal Pasir Ris Park. Boulevards and walkways linked the town centre and the Town Park to the beach and the holiday chalets area, and Pasir Ris was said to be the first town to be planned with a comprehensive network of green spaces and park connectors.

The 1980s was also an era when the HDB's planning approach towards residential towns emphasised optimal land use through density

controls and the integration of the town with the larger transportation network, including the Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) system. The optimisation of land use also included the provisioning of amenities and facilities such as a bus interchange next to the MRT station, neighbourhood and retail centres, a public library, parks and other recreational spaces, a bicycle path network, pedestrian park connectors and pathways, as well as an industrial estate at nearby Loyang which provided employment opportunities.

Towns were also planned and designed to have their individual visual identities, achieved mainly through attractive natural features, landmark buildings and the implementation of the precinct concept. The precinct concept had been adopted by the HDB in the late 1970s, which involved grouping flats into clusters of between four to eight blocks, were designed to encourage communal contact and neighbourliness, and delineated by varying designs along precinct boundaries. In the mid-1980s, Pasir Ris Town was marketed as

a town with recreational amenities that could rival that of the coveted Marine Parade area, and with flats that had better build quality and designs compared to earlier public housing estates.

With housing shortage becoming less of an urgent issue by the 1980s, the HDB could focus on quality over quantity by introducing new flat designs and estate layouts, and



Reclamation works at the Loyang area, 1982
Courtesy of the Housing & Development Board



Green spaces and linkways that connect Pasir Ris' neighbourhoods, 1988
Courtesy of the Housing & Development Board

experimenting with varied architectural approaches while implementing more stringent guidelines for contractors. Pasir Ris was thus one of the first towns to feature the Model A design of flats, which had redesigned layouts and improved finishings including windows, sliding doors and balconies. Improved build quality and interiors as well as stronger visual identities and amenities meant that by the late 1980s, flats in Pasir Ris were being held up as emblems of a transformative era in public housing, when HDB flats were taking early steps towards matching and/or exceeding the quality of life offered by private condominiums.

PASIR RIS' DESIGN IDENTITY

Developed in an era when the HDB was heightening its focus on distinctive visual identities for each town as well as between the neighbourhood precincts, the design and architecture of Pasir Ris took inspiration from its history as a seaside resort. In contrast to the standardised designs of earlier decades when the emphasis was on quantity to ease the housing crunch, HDB architects were given rein to explore the seaside theme in Pasir Ris, as well as incorporate designs from local cultures, paired with modern and tropical architectural expressions through the use of varied building materials and designs.

The seaside resort theme is expressed in the form of architectural details on HDB blocks. These include lighthouse-shaped turrets formed by columns of balconies and grille patterns inspired by traditional tropical basket-weaving designs. The facades of buildings in the town also bear other maritime themes. For example, void decks and precinct boundary walls feature port-hole-shaped openings, while flat windows and balconies are framed within clam-shaped openings.

The first flats in Pasir Ris were offered for sale in March 1988, with 4-room Simplified Model and 4-room Model A flats, as well as executive maisonette apartments among the 240 units available. Development costs released by the government that year showed that the 4-room Model A flats had construction costs of \$53,000 and land costs of \$17,800, with the average cost of land in Pasir Ris being some \$320 per square metre. In March 1988, the public housing population of Pasir Ris Town stood at 3,770 people living in 890 flats. Some three decades later, this had grown to 108,400 residents in 29,654 flats.

Parks and pathways between precincts also feature design motifs of sea creatures including prawns and shells, and had names such as Atlantis and Aquaria. At a larger scale, neighbourhood centres are distinguished by maritime-inflected designs such as the ship-shaped Loyang Point with architectural elements including the compass platform of ships and the smoke-stacks of steamships, as well as the wave-forms of the Elias Mall roof.

Residential blocks and shophouses in Pasir Ris also have pitched roofs and clay tiles, while some flat interiors are enlivened by the use of wall tiles with motifs drawn from local cultures, including designs inspired by sarongs, flower hangings found in Hindu temples and Peranakan shophouse motifs. The national flower, Vanda Miss Joaquim, is showcased as motifs on facades, water tanks, shophouse gables and pediments as well as along corridors and pathways.

These design motifs helped create distinctive visual identities for each precinct, as did the use of different colour schemes and mosaic tiles at lift lobbies that presented scenes of urban skylines among others.



Flats with lighthouse-shaped turrets, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



Flats with porthole openings, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



Flats with clam-shaped openings, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



Flats with the Vanda Miss Joaquim design motif, 1990
Courtesy of the Housing & Development Board



Loyang Point, 1994
Courtesy of the Housing & Development Board

SUNGEI API API AND SUNGEI TAMPINES

The beaches and the sea have long been associated with and shaped the culture and history of Pasir Ris, but the area's mangrove-coated rivers have been just as influential in the ways people lived, worked and played here. In the kampong days, the rivers, including Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines, provided sustenance and materials for industry. Today, these rivers have become social, recreational and educational spaces.

As havens of biodiversity, the rivers and preserved mangrove stretches within the housing estates of Pasir Ris, maintain a living connection to the natural and social histories of this area.

The brackish waters of Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines allow mangroves to thrive, which in turn provides an environment rich in plant, animal and insect life. During the kampong era, people in Pasir Ris turned to the rivers for fish, prawns and crabs, and tapped mangrove timber to make boats, tools and charcoal. The *attap* palm (*Nypa fruticans*) also provided roofing for houses, as well as the *attap chee* fruit found in deserts such as *ice kacang*. The Api Api family of mangroves (*Avicennia*) also provides the river with its name.

In 1960, Sungei Api Api was the location of the Work Brigade's first infrastructural project. The Brigade had been set up by the government as a means of providing temporary employment. Having set up a camp at Pasir Ris, some 200 Work Brigade members, including 50

women, toiled on improving rural roads and the reclamation of swamps in the area. With farmers at the time complaining that their crops were “threatened by floods every time it rained”, the Work Brigade constructed a 300-metre canal along a section of Sungei Api Api that drained into the sea and helped alleviate floods. Embankments along the canal and a tidal gate were also built, and parts of the river were widened.

The above-mentioned infrastructural project was the precursor of the major redevelopment of the riverine area during the construction of



The stretch of flats along Sungei Tampines, 1988
Courtesy of the Housing & Development Board



Mangrove trees lining Sungei Api Api, flanked by public housing flats, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Pasir Ris Town in the 1980s. During this time, Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines were realigned from their formerly meandering courses and given separate river mouths, and the swamps and former sand quarries around the rivers were filled in. With the primary focus at the time being drainage and stormwater management, the rivers were largely converted into concretised canals.

The timely establishment of the Waterbodies Design Panel in 1989 to evaluate and advise the government on the aesthetic aspects of waterways in Singapore also gave new life to the rivers. In the early 1990s, to cater to the increasing drainage needs of the area, the banks of Sungei Api Api were stabilised and expanded by driving piles into the sides of the canal to prevent soil collapses. At Sungei Tampines, an inflatable weir was installed to maintain consistent water levels.

A crucial decision was also taken to preserve existing clusters of mangroves and plant additional mangroves along Sungei Api Api, which helped retain the character of the area while integrating the rivers with the recreational

and aesthetic needs of the neighbouring housing estates. Moh Wung Hee, a former director at Public Utilities Board, recalled:

“The Sungei Api Api (meandered) and flows through a mangrove swamp. (If) development takes place, the storm flow will increase and the river (will have) to be made bigger. Of course, one way to overcome this was to build a conventional canal. But... it made a lot of sense to conserve the mangroves.”

Maria Boey, one of the HDB planners for Pasir Ris Town, says that the redeveloped river and its mangroves are a vital aspect of the town today:

“The most outstanding thing (about Pasir Ris) is the Sungei Api Api project. It was an integration of the (natural) environment, housing, the landscape and people using the space, and (was) unique as the only space where mangroves grow next to housing.”

The Pasir Ris experiment with mangrove conservation and replanting has since been implemented at various sites across Singapore, including waterways at Punggol and at the Semakau landfill. Having brought together public agencies like HDB, PUB and Urban Redevelopment Authority to provide an integrated solution to multiple urban issues, the Sungei Api Api project is today held up as a forerunner of Singapore’s harnessing of waterbodies as urban attractions, recreational spaces and for waterfront living, such as PUB’s Active, Beautiful, Clean (ABC Waters) programme.

The natural and aesthetic qualities of Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines were further enhanced as part of the aforementioned ABC Waters programme in 2015, when additional mangroves and other greenery were planted along canal walls, while cleansing biotopes and rain gardens were added next to the rivers’ pedestrian pathways. More shelters and seating for visitors to enjoy the rivers were also constructed, while information panels help educate the public on the wide biodiversity supported by the mangroves.

PASIR RIS PARK

Developed by the Parks and Recreation Department (PRD, now part of the National Parks Board) in the 1980s, Pasir Ris Park has become a well-loved recreational space that maintains a link to the area’s natural heritage with the preservation of a section of the area’s original mangrove forest. Activities such as camping, picnicking and sailing also recall the pastimes of earlier eras, with the Pasir Ris Beach and the now-demolished Pasir Ris Hotel being located within the park.

The park spans Pasir Ris Road in the west and Jalan Loyang Besar in the east and includes a 3.2-kilometre stretch of beach. More than half of the park’s 70 hectares is reclaimed land, with the government reclaiming a 44-hectare plot of land between 1978 and 1980. Part of the reclamation centred on the Sungei Tampines area, and the reclaimed areas were protected from erosion by a series of headland breakwaters, which also helped in the formation of sandy beaches. In the 1990s, another area spanning nearly 10 hectares was reclaimed for the park.

Planning for Pasir Ris Park began in the 1970s, with government policy at the time oriented towards the development of large parks that were strategically located near population centres. This was a period of increasing urbanisation and the government regarded parks like Pasir Ris Park as “regional lungs” equipped with facilities for active lifestyles. Dr Chua Sian Eng, Commissioner of Parks and Recreation said in 1984: “We have decided to space out our large parks to cater to the other population centres. We cannot expect people living in the north-eastern part of the island to go all the way to the East Coast for the weekend.”

When it was announced in 1984, Pasir Ris Park was publicised as Singapore’s second largest park at the time, after East Coast Park. The development of Pasir Ris Park occurred in phases and spanned more than a decade, with its first section officially opened on 23



A playground at Pasir Ris Park, 1987
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

August 1986. By the mid-1980s, park policy had evolved with a focus on keeping up with the increasingly discerning recreational needs of Singaporeans, as well as the more diverse green spaces they desired. Dr Chua described the changing approach, which guided the development of different types of parks:

"In the early days, we just planted a lot of fast-growing trees. It might have been done a little haphazardly as the objective then was to green up the country. Now we look more specifically at what to plant, and at putting up more recreational facilities. We have to provide a better environment because of the better quality of life in Singapore."

Pasir Ris Park was designed by a multinational team which included Junichi Inada, a Japanese landscape architect who was also involved in the design and conceptualisation of the park connector network, Japanese consultants Yoshiteru Nojima and Rew Matsui, Hans Haas from Switzerland, Otto Fung from Hong Kong and Ong Cheng Leong from Malaysia. Inada later reflected on his experiences in Singapore, including leading the design and theming of Pasir Ris Park:



The entrance to the park, 1987
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

"As a young Japanese landscape architect, Singapore provided endless grounds for my imagination to run free in designing lush and comfortable outdoor public green spaces, towards the goal of realising the Garden City vision. In actualising the grand vision, I found myself constantly going back to my roots in traditional Japanese garden design, pursuing what is an innate part of me: the 'Japanese sense of beauty'."

At its inception, as conceptualised by Inada, the park had sections with the themes of Children's Holiday, Saturday Afternoon and Fairweather Sunday. These sections were



Pasir Ris Park's Adventure Playground, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

envisioned as a playground with equipment designed to stimulate the imagination, an area for running, cycling and active sports, and a section for more restful recreations like strolling and picnicking respectively. Having had its themed sections evolve and augmented over the decades, Pasir Ris Park today includes an adventure playground, cycling and running tracks, a kitchen garden, a butterfly garden, a maze garden and camping sites, set on undulating terrain designed to provide views of the sea.

The approach towards park development in the 1980s also incorporated increased consciousness about environmental conservation, and parks in Singapore gradually began to feature more diverse natural ecosystems such as marshlands and mangroves. Within Pasir Ris Park, a six-hectare plot of mangrove forest next to Sungei Tampines was preserved and a boardwalk was installed for visitors. The plant-life within the forest includes Nipah Palm (*Nypa fruticans*), Api Api Putih (*Avicennia alba*), Bakau Minyak (*Rhizophora apiculata*) and Perepat (*Sonneratia alba*). At the time,

the PRD's assistant commissioner Lee Wai Chin said: "We are preserving (the mangroves) for interest and educational purposes so that one day, people won't ask what a mangrove looks like."

A habitat rich in biodiversity, the mangrove forest also harbours butterflies, dragonflies, mudskippers and mud lobsters, and water monitors among other fauna. A three-storey bird-watching tower within the forest affords the chance to spot white-collared kingfishers, blue-throated bee-eaters, Oriental Pied Hornbills and other birds. Visitors to the park have also spotted the occasional crocodile, as well as a family of otters that have proven to be popular with photographers and animal-lovers.

PASIR RIS TOWN PARK

94 Pasir Ris Central

Pasir Ris Town Park was established in the late 1980s and is best known for its large pond, which is the only commercial saltwater fishing pond in Singapore. Drawing hobbyist anglers from all over Singapore, this fishing pond sustains the culture of fishing that has

always been a feature of Pasir Ris, having evolved over the years from subsistence for kampong residents to a commercial industry, and eventually to the recreational activity it is today.

The 14-hectare park was constructed by the HDB during the development of Pasir Ris Town and was completed in the late 1980s before coming under the management of the Parks & Recreation Department (now part of the National Parks Board) in 1989. Pasir Ris Town Park also includes gardens, fitness corners, a hawker centre and a playground.

One of the main attractions in the Town Park is the above-mentioned fishing pond that had been kept in place by the HDB during the development of the park. This pond had previously been part of a sand quarry, before becoming a fishing and boating pond within the former Golden Palace Holiday Resort. In the 1980s, the pond was converted to an aquaculture research station by the former Primary Production Department and was later integrated into the Town Park. In 1990, the pond was leased to commercial fishing operators.

Fed by the brackish waters of Sungei Tampines, the variety of fishes found in the pond is supplied by a fish farm in Kukup, Malaysia, and the pond is the only one in Singapore where saltwater fish species like barramundi, mangrove jack, snappers, threadfin, grouper and pomfrets can thrive. The pond is segmented into different areas to cater to diverse fishing interests, and includes an educational zone and a section for prawn fishing.



A fisherman's catch at the Pasir Ris fishing pond, 1990s
Courtesy of D'Best Recreation Pte Ltd

Andy Tay Choon Moh (b.1958), who operated the fishing pond in the early 1990s and over different periods in the following decades, said that the pond has built up a regular clientele while continuing to attract new anglers. With the smell of brine in the air and a rustic setting, the fishing pond within the Town Park evokes a kampong atmosphere. Longtime patrons have bestowed nicknames on different parts of the pond, including "Saudi Arabia", for a sunny area where temperatures seem perpetually high, and "Malay kampong" for an area favoured by Malay anglers and picnicking families. Tay estimated that in 2019, the pond received around 8,000 visitors each month.



Fishermen at Pasir Ris Town Park, 2000
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



The fishing pond at Pasir Ris Town Park, 1990s
Courtesy of D'Best Recreation Pte Ltd

HOUSES OF FAITH

SAKYA TENPHEL LING

5 Pasir Ris Drive 4

Established in Pasir Ris in 1995, Sakya Tenphel Ling is one of the first Tibetan Buddhist temples in Southeast Asia. The Sakya tradition is one of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and derives its name from the Tibetan words *sa skya*, meaning "pale earth". This phrase was commonly used to describe the landscape at Sakya Monastery, which was established in southern Tibet in 1073.

The temple's roots can be traced to the Singapore Buddhist Youth Circle formed in the late 1950s by teachers and students at Maha Bodhi School. The group was later registered as the Singapore Buddha Sasana Society in 1965 and operated from various premises including Serangoon and Geylang. The Sakya movement in Singapore gained momentum with the visit of Sakya Trizin Ngawang Kunga in 1978, who was the 41st head of the Sakya lineage of Tibetan Buddhism and became

the society's spiritual patron. He later sent the former principal of the Tantric College of Sakya Monastery in Tibet, Ponlop Lama Tashi Tenzin, to become the society's first Resident Monk.

In the 1990s, the society established Sakya Tenphel Ling, which officially opened in Pasir Ris on 31 December 1995 and contains a shrine hall, classrooms, meditation rooms and monks' quarters. The temple became an unofficial regional headquarters for the Sakya movement and frequently receives visiting monks from Nepal, India, Taiwan and other countries. The monks lead services categorised into *pujas* (devotional expressions which include the popular Naga Puja and the Fire Puja), rituals and *dharma* religious teachings. The monks also lead the chanting of sutras (Hindu and Buddhist religious texts) in Tibetan and the Pali liturgical language, instruct moral and devotional precepts, and guide meditation classes.



Sakya Tenphel Ling, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



A prayer session at the temple, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

The painting and ornamental architecture of the temple are mainly done by visiting and resident monks. They follow the Sakya colour theory in which the colours red, blue and white represent Tibetan-Buddhist deities associated with wisdom, compassion and power. Within its interiors, the temple's shrine includes representations of the Buddha, bodhisattvas including Tara and Chenrezig (also known to the Chinese as Guanyin), and stupas (reliquaries) for Sakya spiritual leaders.

BETHESDA PASIR RIS MISSION CHURCH

11 Pasir Ris Drive 2

Opened in 1996, Bethesda Pasir Ris Mission Church has its roots in the Brethren Christian movement, which was established in the United Kingdom in the early 19th century. The movement was brought to Singapore by English businessman Phillip Robinson, who also founded the longstanding Robinson's departmental store.

Robinson helped establish Brethren Mission Rooms at Bencoolen Street in 1864, before Bethesda Chapel was founded at Bras Basah Road in 1866. Through its outreach efforts,



Bethesda Pasir Ris Mission Church, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Bethesda Chapel seeded a number of churches in Singapore, including Bethesda (Katong) Church in 1936 and Bethesda Frankel Estate Church in 1964.

These churches eventually became autonomous and their communities helped establish new churches including one at Pasir Ris, which sprung from a gathering of worshippers in Chai Chee in the 1970s. This group established the Bethesda Bedok Mission Home at Sennett Road in 1976, before moving to Pasir Ris in July 1996. Bethesda Pasir Ris Mission Church was officially opened and dedicated on 18 January 1997.

Today, Bethesda Pasir Ris Mission Church serves Mandarin, English, Indonesian and Filipino congregations, with the latter named the Papuri ("praise" in Tagalog) congregation, and organises services in their respective languages.

PENTECOST METHODIST CHURCH

4 Pasir Ris Drive 6

Established as Geylang Straits Chinese Methodist Church in the Aljunied Road and Sims Road area in 1936, Pentecost Methodist Church relocated to Pasir Ris in 1994. Founded through Methodist outreach efforts to Peranakans in the 1930s, the church maintains the tradition of services in the community's patois of Baba Malay today. These religious services include choruses sung and sermons spoken in Baba Malay.

Methodist worship services for the Peranakan community were first held on Pentecost Sunday (a Christian holy day commemorating



Pentecost Methodist Church, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

the biblical episode of Pentecost) in 1932, with the Reverend Chew Hock Hin appointed as pastor. The Geylang church was formed four years later, before relocating to Koon Seng Road in the 1960s and then to Pasir Ris in 1994. The consecration service for the Pasir Ris church was held on 23 October 1994.

Over the years, the church has been associated with the Epworth League, the precursor of the Methodist Youth Fellowship, and was part of the Straits Chinese District of the Methodist Church in Malaya. Today, it is part of the Methodist Church in Singapore and holds services in Baba Malay, Mandarin and English.

LOYANG TUA PEK KONG TEMPLE

20 Loyang Way

Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple houses deities from Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism and the uniquely Malayan deity Datuk Kong. The origin of the temple can be dated back to the construction of a makeshift shrine near the Loyang coastline in the 1980s. The makeshift shrine attracted a large number of devotees, mainly from the Loyang Industrial Estate, but had burned down in a fire in 1996.

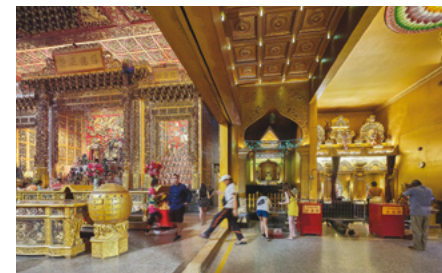
Following the incident, a temple was built at 62G Loyang Way on a site by the coast with help from public donations in December 2000. According to Huang Zhong Ting, a representative of the temple in the early 2000s, the institution was named Loyang Tua



Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple, which was formerly located near the coastline, undated
Courtesy of Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple

Pek Kong Temple as "the Taoist Tua Pek Kong (statue)... was the only statue from the original pile which miraculously survived the fire."

However, as the site was not zoned for religious use, the temple shifted to another location in 2003, before moving to its present premises in 2007. Opened in August that year, the temple organised a series of consecration ceremonies, which included one for the temple's Loyang Sri Maha Ganapathy sanctum, which enshrined the Hindu deity Lord Ganesha. Around 8,000 devotees including some 2,000 non-Hindus attended the ceremony, which was performed by Hindu priests including high priests invited from India. Carved from volcanic rock, the two-metre-tall statue of Ganesha was said to be the largest representation of the deity outside India at the time of the ceremony, and had been gifted to the temple by a Buddhist monastery in Tampines.



The Taoist, Datuk Kong and Hindu sections of Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



The Hindu section of the temple, 2018
Courtesy of Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple



The temple's Buddhist section, featuring the abacus with a lotus motif, 2018
Courtesy of Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple

The temple is divided into sections for Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Datuk Kong. These sections are distinguished by interior architecture styles that reflect their individual religious traditions, including lotus motifs for Buddhism and the yin-yang symbol for Taoism. Stone panels depicting scenes from traditional Chinese culture line the walls of the main hall, and the ceiling features numerous sculpted lanterns and dragons.

The main prayer hall houses the presiding deity, Tua Pek Kong, whose statue is placed in the centre of the main altar. The hall also

includes a group of 60 statues representing Tai Sui, as well as other Taoist deities including the earth god Tu Di Gong and the Monkey God. The inner hall for Buddhist deities houses a shrine for the Dizang Bodhisattva and an ornately carved ceiling-mounted abacus with a lotus motif. Another abacus is mounted on the floor, and as part of invocations for prosperity, devotees often use the abacus to derive auspicious lottery numbers, with many scrawling their numbers on surfaces around the temple.

The temple's other sections contain shrines for Datuk Kong as well as Ganesha and other Hindu deities. Datuk Kong, a Malayan deity inspired by Chinese conceptions of local guardian spirits, is represented by a *keramat* (a shrine) wrapped with a yellow cloth and housed within an onion dome structure. Ganesha, the elephant-headed Hindu deity of wisdom, fortune and the removal of obstacles, is worshipped in the remaining section.

Open for 24 hours each day, Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple is popular with devotees praying for health, wealth and prosperity, and in the 2000s, it received crowds of more than 10,000 people on weekends and during religious events. Among the events celebrated at the temple are the Jade Emperor's Birthday, Lord Ganesha's Birthday, the Mid-Autumn Festival and the harvest festival of Ponggal.

The major celebration of Tua Pek Kong's birthday, an event held across multiple days, is well-attended and involves a ritual where thousands of devotees form a queue according to their Chinese zodiac signs, with those born in the Year of the Rat being the first to cross a 35-metre wooden bridge for good luck and prosperity. Other activities organised during the birthday period include Chinese opera and puppet shows.

In a syncretic religious tradition that has emerged organically, visitors to the temple often perform prayers and make offerings to deities from all the four religions presented

in the temple. One devotee, Manoj Premnath, was quoted in 2007 as saying the multiple faiths "create a sense of belonging within society. Initially, I felt shy about coming here, but I became comfortable very quickly and I don't feel out of place at all now."

MASJID AL-ISTIGHFAR

2 Pasir Ris Walk

Masjid Al-Istighfar is among the few mosques in Singapore that open for 24 hours every day, and draw congregants from across the island, including Muslims making their way to Mecca for the haj pilgrimage via Changi Airport and travellers returning to Singapore. Established in 1999, the mosque derives its name from the Arabic word *istighfar*, which is an Islamic concept of seeking repentance in God.

The mosque was built with strong community support, as its longtime head of operations Haji Mohammed Roslan (b. 1955) remembers:

"In the 1990s, Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS, the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore) brought together Pasir Ris residents and formed a committee for the building of the mosque. Many of them were former kampong residents from Pasir Ris, Loyang and Tampines, and were keen to get involved. They worked day and night to raise funds - while the construction of the building was financed through the Mosque Building Fund (contributions from the Muslim public), we needed donations for operations, interior furnishings and activities. We organised many fundraising activities, families would take home a donation tin and bring it back full, while the ladies made and sold nasi briyani (a rice dish) and the volunteers even helped clear the land of trees and bushes before the contractors came in for construction."

The building's architecture is inspired by the 17th century Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey, popularly known as the "Blue Mosque". Al-Istighfar features two blue onion-shaped domes, with the larger capping the main building and crowned with a crescent and star. The mosque building is also distinguished by the geometric motifs



The official opening of Masjid Al-Istighfar, 2000
Courtesy of Masjid Al-Istighfar

and windows characteristic of Islamic architecture, along with wide roof eaves and high ceilings adapted to Singapore's tropical climate.

Today, the mosque continues to operate with significant community involvement, with volunteers helping during events such as the korban ritual slaughter of sheep and the charitable distribution of meat during Hari Raya Haji, as well as participating in social welfare programmes organised by the mosque. In 2019, the mosque could accommodate up to 5,000 people.

However, Masjid Al-Istighfar's engagement extends beyond the Muslim community. The mosque regularly collaborates with nearby religious institutions including Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple and Bethesda Pasir Ris Mission Church on walking, running and cycling events to raise funds for charity, and visits where people can learn more about the respective religions. The institutions also exchange gifts of rice during religious periods, with the mosque using contributions of rice for the *sahur* communal breaking of fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

In addition, the mosque has long had a tradition of various faiths, with Haji Mohammed Roslan saying: "Our mosque is open to all, and Muslims and non-Muslims can just walk in to learn more about us." As a tangible gesture of this welcoming stance, water coolers and benches were installed in front of the mosque for public use, symbolising its openness to all.



A prayer session inside Masjid Al-Istighfar, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



The water coolers installed for public use under Masjid Al-Istighfar's "Water for All" initiative, 2019
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

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SUGGESTED SHORT TRAIL ROUTES

COASTAL HERITAGE

1 hour on foot; 0.5 hours on bicycle

Developed in the 1980s, Pasir Ris Town retains characteristics of the area's past, including its resort feel and its fishing and coastal heritage. A mangrove forest within Pasir Ris Park also maintains a living connection to the past, when mangrove timber served as an important resource for villagers. This route brings you to sites of heritage significance along Pasir Ris' coast and beachfront.



Begin your journey at the entrance of Pasir Ris Park (near Carpark B), which was developed by the former Parks and Recreation Department (now National Parks Board) in the 1980s. More than half of the park's 70 hectares were reclaimed from mangrove swamps, mudflats and waterways, and its long seafront stretches from Pasir Ris Beach to Sungei Loyang.

Head into the six-hectare Mangrove Forest, which stands as a reminder of rural Pasir Ris before redevelopment. Walk along the boardwalk to learn about mangrove species that once covered the coastline, such as the red-flowered Teruntum Merah and the Nipah Palm, the source of *attap chee* fruit and *gula melaka* (palm sugar). You will also come across a bird-watching tower, which provides a good vantage point to observe the wildlife here. If

you have a pair of binoculars, you might be able to spot Grey Herons, otters or even the occasional estuarine crocodile!

After leaving the forest, head towards Pasir Ris Beach. This area was where the former holiday bungalow of Jewish businessman Joseph Elias once stood. Elias' bungalow was one of many such dwellings built in Pasir Ris by wealthy families from the early 20th century. In 1952, Elias' bungalow was redeveloped into Pasir Ris Hotel, which operated until 1983. During this time, facilities such as seats, shelters and barbeque pits were also installed at the beach for public use. Today, swimming, kayaking and lounging at the beach remain popular activities.

After sinking your feet into the white sands of Pasir Ris Beach, take a stroll further down the park and cross the bridge spanning Sungei Api Api. This stream is one of two rivers that flow through the park, and its name Api Api is derived from the local name for the Avicennia family of mangroves, which used to be found abundantly in the area.

As you continue walking down the path, look out towards the sea and spot a number of *kelongs*, or stilt fishing structures, as well as fish farms. Before *kelongs* were introduced to Singapore in the early 1800s, spear-fishing was the dominant mode of fishing on the island. During the kampong era, *kelongs* were built using bakau timber, which was obtained from mangroves in areas like Pasir Ris.

Next, make your way past the former People's Association (PA) Holiday Flats. Completed in 1973, these holiday facilities enabled Singaporeans to rent a chalet at an affordable price. In the 1980s, they were among the most popular holiday facilities operated by the PA,

which included flats and camps in Punggol and St. John's Island. You can also check out the now iconic Elephant Playground within the neighbouring cluster of chalets. Just past the Holiday Flats is PAssion WaVe @ Pasir Ris, a specialist community club offering water sports such as dinghy sailing and kayaking.

Finally, make your way to Adventure Playground, where you can wind down by enjoying the play facilities at one of the largest playgrounds in Singapore, or watch the kids hard at play climbing the giant space net or riding on swings. Although the trail ends here, you may wish to continue on exploring the town by going on the Play @ Pasir Ris trail.

PLAY @ PASIR RIS

1 hour on foot

Pasir Ris has earned a reputation as a place for play and recreation since the 19th century, and later generations continue to enjoy various forms of leisure here. This trail takes you through sites of recreation in Pasir Ris, such as one of Singapore's largest playgrounds and the country's only commercial saltwater fishing pond.



Start at Adventure Playground, which opened in 1986. This play complex is one of Singapore's largest playgrounds, and features equipment and facilities designed to stimulate the imagination. These include a seven-metre-tall netted rope pyramid, cableways, thematic play stations and large sandpits recalling the sand quarries that dotted this area in the past.

From the modern play complex, take a bus towards Elias Mall. Next to Elias Mall is a

1980s playground built by the Housing & Development Board (HDB), popularly known as the Bumboat Playground. This is one of HDB's mosaic series of playgrounds, which are known for their terrazzo tiles, geometric lines and designs based on Asian cultures, animals, trades and food. The centrepiece of this playground is the bumboat or twakow, a distinctive boat with a red-green-white livery and painted eye motifs on its bow that was used to transport goods.

From Elias Mall, walk east along Pasir Ris Drive 3 to Pasir Ris Town Park. Here, you can try your hand at fishing in Singapore's only saltwater fishing pond, which was established in 1989. The large pond was previously one of the main attractions of the former Golden Palace Holiday Resort, which operated from 1967 to the early 1970s. Today, this facility is well known among anglers as a place to catch marine fish, prawns and crabs.

The Town Park also includes a sports centre with a swimming pool, a playground and gardens, as well as the nearby Pasir Ris Central Hawker Centre, which opened in 2018 and is the only hawker centre in this town. Cool down at the hawker centre by grabbing a drink and trying out the specialty dishes that this centre is known for. If you are still up for more exploring, please proceed onto the next trail!

Optional: If you are in the mood for more recreation, head to Downtown East, a leisure and theme park complex established in 1988 and envisioned as a "country club for workers". Modelled after the popular Butlins holiday camps in the United Kingdom when it was first conceived in the 1970s, this complex has grown to include chalets, various recreational facilities, the former Escape Theme Park and today's Wild Wild Wet water park.



ARCHITECTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

1.5 hours on foot

Pasir Ris is a showcase of unique architectural styles and elements, many of which draw inspiration from the town's coastal heritage. This trail explores the built environment of Pasir Ris Town, from its maritime-themed public housing blocks to its diverse range of cultural and religious institutions.



From Pasir Ris Town Park, head towards the bridge spanning Sungei Api Api and take the sidewalk towards Pasir Ris Drive 1. This stretch of *riverfront flats*, and those at Sungei Api Api, were built in the 1980s when the HDB was seeking to diversify the designs of public housing. Here, low blocks with a distinctive pitched-roof design are interspersed with higher blocks to create a picturesque view along the river. To complement the natural environment, the sidewalk running along the river is landscaped with coconut palms, riverside seating and viewing decks.

Cross the traffic lights when you reach Pasir Ris Drive 1, and head east to Pasir Ris Street 11. Take a stroll down the street and look out for the unique housing designs here, which feature nautical motifs resembling a ship's *portholes* (Blocks 130-137) as well as *lighthouse-shaped façades* (Blocks 138-146).

At the intersection of Pasir Ris Street 11 and Street 12, head north-east along Street 12 until you reach Pasir Ris Drive 4. At the end of the street you will find *Sakya Tenphel Ling*, one of the first Tibetan temples in Southeast Asia. This temple adheres to the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism and, as a regional Sakya

centre, it is often visited by monks from Nepal, India, Taiwan and other countries. Its five colour scheme and decorative elements, which are painted by resident monks, are based on Tibetan Buddhist colour theory where each colour represents a particular Buddha.

From Sakya Tenphel Ling, walk east through the HDB blocks to Pasir Ris Drive 3, where you will find *Masjid Al-Istighfar*. Established in 1999, Masjid Al-Istighfar draws its design inspiration from the 17th century Sultan Ahmed Mosque, better known as the "Blue Mosque" in Istanbul. It derives its name from the Arabic word *istighfar*, which is an Islamic concept of seeking repentance in God. Al-Istighfar features two blue onion domes, with the larger dome crowned with a crescent and star, and the smaller dome topping the minaret.

Next, walk south along Pasir Ris Drive 3 before turning into Loyang Way. The *Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple*, a temple housing multiple faiths, is located here. The main hall houses its presiding deity, Tua Pek Kong, as well as other Taoist deities including Tai Sui. The elaborate interior architecture includes carved stone panels, an abacus with a lotus motif mounted on the ceiling, and another abacus set on the ground, which feature the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac. The temple also includes shrines for Ganesha and other Hindu deities, as well as a *keramat* dedicated to Datuk Kong, a local guardian spirit.

Optional: If you would like to explore more, head down to the green corridor running alongside Sungei Api Api between Pasir Ris Drives 1 and 3. The award-winning residential estates here are an example of how built and natural environments can come together. Here, you can enjoy the diverse flowers, plants and animal life supported by the mangroves that line Sungei Api Api, which were conserved by National Parks Board to recreate the area's original mangrove habitat. The environmental restoration and engineering solutions used here helped pave the way for later projects such as Punggol Waterway and the Active Beautiful Clean (ABC) Waters programme.

