



A child drawing water from a kampong well in Tampines, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs

The Tampines 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.

» DISCOVER OUR SHARED HERITAGE

# TAMPINES HERITAGE TRAIL



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Tampines Round Market and surrounding estate, 1980s  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board





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# INTRODUCTION



Tampines Central Park, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Today, most Singaporeans know Tampines to be a vibrant town at the forefront of sustainable urban living. The Pan Island Expressway and the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) line deliver crowds of people to this bustling Regional Centre, bound for the shopping malls, offices, factories, and of course, homes.

Yet less than forty years ago, Tampines was mainly accessed by its eponymous road – a winding route that took one past kampongs (“villages” in Malay), farms, and in later years, a detour around the runway of the former Paya Lebar Airport. Not surprisingly, the Tampines of the past was considered to be *ulu* (“remote” in Malay) and it was regarded mainly as a rural district located away from the city.

The early history of this area was also characterised by environmental change, most apparent when the Tempinis trees that lent their name to this district went virtually extinct due to rampant and unsustainable exploitation. From the 1960s, the extraction of sand from quarries in Tampines for the construction of urban Singapore likewise led to a number of environmental issues.

Today, few traces of Tampines’ *ulu* past remain but old images and memories of its former and present residents provide a fascinating glimpse of a district once traversed by plantation workers, sand miners and travelling hawkers. Follow us on this trail and explore the heritage of Tampines through the landmarks and stories behind the transformation of this cornerstone of the east.

# EARLY HISTORY

## MAPPING EARLY TAMPINES

The earliest known reference to the name Tampines can be found in an 1828 map titled *Plan of the British Settlement of Singapore*, attributed to Captain James Franklin and Lieutenant Philip Jackson. This was the first map to accurately depict the outline of Singapore. Captain Franklin, a surveyor with the Bengal Cavalry in India, had undertaken a survey of the island on his own initiative while on leave in Singapore in 1822. In this map, Sungei Tampines appears as “R. Tampenus”.

More details about Tampines emerge in an 1839 map titled *Map of the Island of Singapore and its Dependencies*. It shows a district named Teban and Tampinis, with Sungei Serangoon and Sungei Tampines marking respectively the western and eastern boundaries that demarcated it from

Punggol and Changi. Notably, this boundary of Tampines encompassed today’s Pasir Ris. A road stretching out from Upper Serangoon Road towards Changi is likely to be Tampines Road, although its omission from other maps of the period suggests that the road was probably little more than an earth track until the late 1800s.

A 1850s version of the same map sheds light on the early inhabitants of the area. It shows Sungei Serangoon branching into two smaller streams at its source, with a Malay village (Kampong Teban) located on the eastern side of the river. Today, this is a forested area which Buangkok East Drive runs through. There were two other Malay villages at Loyang (spelt as “Liong”) and along the Pasir Ris coastline, and a Chinese village near the source of Sungei Api Api.



The map of Singapore by Captain James Franklin and Lieutenant Philip Jackson of the East India Company, 1828  
National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board





A map of Singapore, 1898  
Survey Department Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

By 1898, maps show that Teban and Tampines had become two separate districts, with the boundary of Tampines expanding slightly southwards. A village named Kampong Baru also appears near Sungei Blukar, in the vicinity of Lorong Halus (more details about kampongs in Tampines can be found on p. 18).

#### A TAMPINES BY ANY OTHER NAME

The name Tampines, and all its variant spellings, is derived from the *Streblus elongatus* tree, known to locals by its Malay name Tempinis. Colloquially, the tree was also referred to as “Teng Puay Ni” in Hokkien. The transliteration of the name from Malay to English has resulted in the name being spelt in a variety of ways over the years. These variations include Tempenus, Tampinis, Tampenis, Tempenis and Tampines, the last of which is the most familiar variant to Singaporeans today.

This inconsistency in spelling showed up in early maps and street signs. While early 20th century maps drawn up by the former Survey

Department referred to a “Tampines” district, street signs on the ground during that time noted “Tampenis” instead. In 1939, the former Singapore Rural Board replaced all street signs with the present spelling of “Tampines”.

However, the change provoked comments in the newspapers that this particular spelling was misleading as it was likely to be pronounced as “tam-pynes” rather than “tam-pee-nis”. The switch nevertheless stuck, with the Rural Board explaining that it had decided to standardise the spelling. It added that while it had consulted the former Malay Union and had been told that the spelling “Tempines” was the closest version to the Malay word, “Tampines” was still the most familiar form in the end. Nevertheless, the unofficial spelling “Tampenis” continued to appear in newspapers well into the 1950s.

#### TAMPINES ROAD

Tampines Road was constructed in 1847 as a bridle path, which meant that it could only accommodate riders on horseback and those

on foot. In 1865, the colonial government widened the path to allow cart traffic, before the Municipal Commission took over responsibility for the road in 1886 and surfaced the road with laterite, a rust-red type of rock.

From the 19th century, Tampines Road stretched eastwards from the 6th milestone of Serangoon Road to where it met Changi Road. However, in 1953, the road was realigned between the 7¾ milestone and the 9¾ milestone to accommodate the northern end of the new Paya Lebar Airport’s runway. The road was further altered during the development of Tampines Town in the late 1970s, and it now joins Tampines Link and Tampines Avenue.

While Tampines Road was the main thoroughfare leading into the district, there were a number of *lorongs* (“lanes” in Malay) in Tampines that were only formally named in 1948 by the Rural Board. These include the now expunged Lorong Muallap and Jalan Datok Burma, the latter having been named after a



The 7th milestone of Tampines Road, 1955  
F W York Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Burmese temple in Teck Hock Village that was demolished during the Japanese Occupation. The naming of these smaller roads was done partly to facilitate an official system of house addresses and the subsequent notation of these addresses on the identity cards of Singapore residents.



A map showing eastern Singapore, with Tampines Road outlined in red, 1955  
Survey Department Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

## EARLY LAND-USE

In the 1800s, gambier and pepper were the most lucrative cash crops in Singapore, and plantations proliferated across the island, often without legal title or consideration for sustainable development. Primary forests were indiscriminately cleared to make way for these plantations, as well as for the firewood needed to process gambier. By the turn of the century, Singapore had lost some 90% of its forest cover.

The above-mentioned trend of forest clearance was evident in Tampines as well. However, unlike in the north and west of the island, gambier and pepper plantations were not the main causes here. Much of the land in the east was swampy, in the form of mangroves or alluvial plains along rivers, and thus not suitable for these two cash crops.

Instead, the forests in Tampines were cut down for timber, including the much-coveted Tempinis tree, which grows between 12 to 30 metres in height. Traditional uses of Tempinis timber include the manufacture of oars, furniture, flooring and *gasing*, a spinning top used in games (more details about Tempinis trees can be found on p. 10).



*Tempinis* timber is used in the manufacture of *gasing*, a traditional spinning top, undated  
Collection of National Museum of Singapore, Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Similarly, the mangrove forests around Sungei Tampines and Sungei Api Api, which harboured great biodiversity and helped prevent soil erosion and flooding, also yielded valuable timber. These woods, including Perepat (*Sonneratia alba*) and Bakau Pasir (*Rhizophora stylosa*), were prized for their uses in charcoal production, the construction of



*The Tempinis tree (Strobilus elongatus), from which the name Tampines is derived, undated*  
Courtesy of National Parks Board

*kelongs* (offshore fishing platforms) and boats, and for firewood.

Beyond the forests, land in Tampines was also used to grow citronella and lemongrass, which are used in cooking and medicine. During the 1800s, one of the notable estates here was Teban Louisa, a 773-acre citronella plantation, which also produced patchouli and lemongrass essential oils.

Teban Louisa was owned by businessman Hermann Katz, one of the founders of the Katz Brothers trading company. Katz was the first person to import motorcars into Singapore, with a shipment of four Benz cars arriving in 1894. Upon his death in 1906, Katz was described as being among the wealthiest of Singapore's retired merchants. Teban Louisa was sold in the following year for 33,500 Straits dollars.

Another early enterprise in Tampines was the Clearwater Dairy Farm, owned by Charles Edwin Crane and managed by his nephew William Dunman, son of the colonial police

commissioner Thomas Dunman. Crane, who had a residence at Tanjong Katong, also built a house near his farm in Tampines. The farm started in 1887 with cattle of the Ayrshire breed and other breeds from India. However, there was little grass on the property for the cows to graze, and Dunman described in a newspaper report how grass had to be collected from "swamplands some miles away".

Clearwater looked to the European community in Singapore for its clientele. Dunman related how bottles of milk were delivered twice daily to Tanglin via bullock cart, where most of his customers lived. By 1891, the cost of each bottle of milk was 12.5 cents which was higher than those sold by his competitors. As a comparison, a labourer in the plantations during this time could expect to earn between two to three Straits dollars a month.

As Clearwater struggled to compete with cheaper milk from Indian cattle herders, colonial newspapers sought to support the enterprise by inveighing against "native purveyors" of "diluted milk", even accusing them of mixing water from ditches into their milk. Reflecting the colonial bias of the time, one report described Clearwater as "the only source of milk supply above suspicion", while an editorial was adamant that "the enormous value of absolutely pure milk to delicate European children who have to spend their earliest years in the tropics cannot be too much insisted on". Despite these efforts, the farm was eventually bought over by Chinese management and moved from Tampines to Bukit Timah by 1901.

In the early 1900s, many plantations in Tampines, including the former Teban Louisa, were converted to coconut and rubber estates. The swampy soils of Tampines suited both crops, with coconuts in particular thriving throughout the east, including at Bedok and Siglap. *The Eastern Daily Mail* newspaper, drawing from the Straits Settlements annual report of 1905, noted: "There has been a marked increase in the formation of coconut plantations, especially in the direction of Tampenis."

These coconut plantations were essential to the manufacture of toddy, an alcoholic drink distilled from coconut sap. From the 1930s, the colonial government began to regulate the production and sale of toddy more strictly. An article in the *Morning Tribune* explained that this was done to prevent "unscrupulous" practices by private retailers, some of whom reportedly mixed highly fermented toddy with copper coins and other materials to increase the drink's alcoholic strength. As such, toddy could only be sold in shops set up by the former Government Monopolies Department.



*A worker climbing a coconut tree to draw sap for the production of toddy, early 20th century*  
Collection of National Museum of Singapore, Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Government control over toddy production, moreover, extended to the farming of coconut sap, which was mainly produced by the coconut plantations in Tampines. The *Tribune* went on to describe these plantations as follows:

*"In Singapore, the vast coconut [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!"*

The article also mentioned a toddy depot located in Tampines. Besides toddy, it was also common knowledge that the coconut tree could be used for a myriad of other products, including food, oil and various household implements.



Concurrently, rubber was also being promoted as a crop of great economic potential by Sir Henry Ridley, then director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, since the 1880s. However, it was not until the early 1900s that demand for rubber soared worldwide. Shipped from the port of Singapore, Malayan rubber was used to manufacture automobile and bicycle tyres, and to insulate electrical wiring.



A joint coconut (left) and rubber plantation (right), similar to that managed by the Tempinis Para and Coconut Plantations Limited, 1900s  
Collection of National Museum of Singapore, Courtesy of National Heritage Board

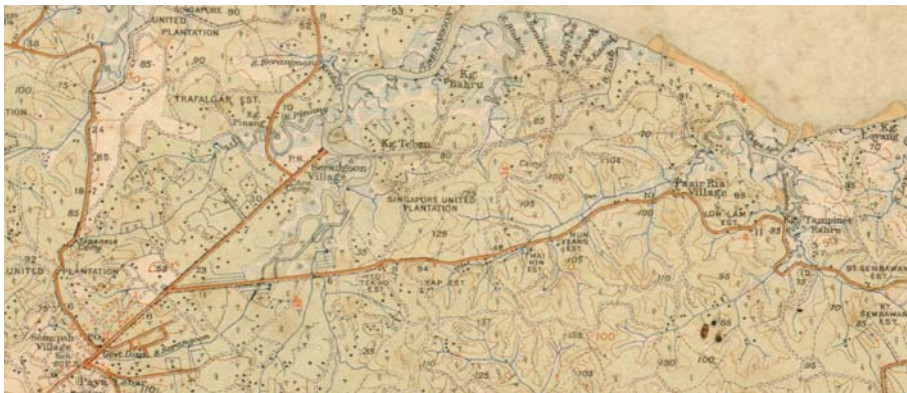
One of the largest coconut and rubber estates in Tampines was also among the earliest in the area. This was owned by the Tempenis Para and Coconut Plantations Limited, a company that had prominent names such as philanthropists Tan Chay Yan and Dr Lim Boon Keng on its board of directors. In 1910, it held a swathe of more than 3,000 acres of land in Tampines and was considered to be one of the finest estates in Singapore and the Malay Peninsula. Others who owned rubber



Tan Chay Yan (left) and Dr Lim Boon Keng (right), directors of the Tempinis Para and Coconut Plantations Limited, 1890s and 1930s respectively  
Left: Lee Brothers Studio Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore  
Right: Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

and coconut estates here during the early 20th century included Khoo Hun Yeang, after whom Hun Yeang Road is named, and Singapore's "Pineapple King", Lim Nee Soon.

A 1932 map reveals that, by this time, the landscape of Tampines was dotted by plantations of various sizes. It shows the Yeo Tek Ho, Yap, Thai Hin, Hun Yeang and Loh Lam plantations in a line along Tampines Road, as well as estates belonging to companies such as Bukit Sembawang Estates Limited and its subsidiary, the Singapore United Rubber Plantation. When the Singapore government began acquiring land in Tampines in the 1970s to construct public housing, Bukit Sembawang, which took over land holdings from Tempenis Para and Coconut Plantations in 1911, was one of the largest landowners in the area.



A map of Singapore showing plantations along Tampines Road, 1932  
National Library of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Besides the cultivation of such crops, there are also references to sand being obtained from the area in the early 1900s although it was only in the late 1950s that Tampines became known for its massive sand quarries. *The Singapore Free Press* newspaper described in 1912 how water from MacRitchie Reservoir

was piped to the waterworks at Woodleigh in the Upper Serangoon area. The nine filter beds at Woodleigh, spanning nearly seven acres, used granite and 28,000 cubic yards of sand from Tampines and Changi as a filtering medium (more details about sand quarries can be found on p. 35).

## AN EARLY SETTLER IN TAMPINES

In the 19th century, early villages in Tampines were largely located along rivers like Sungei Serangoon and Sungei Tampines. These kampongs gradually expanded inland, and their populations increased with steady flows of immigration.

The experience of Tay Chin Tian (b. 1897), who arrived in Singapore in the 1910s, illuminated a side of life in the early Tampines villages:

"When I first arrived here, I rented a room in Kangkar ('river mouth' in Teochew; the name of a village located at the end of Upper Serangoon Road). We stayed there for about three to four years.... (After) the chickens we reared started dying one by one, we were told by a chicken seller not to stay there if we wanted to rear poultry. He suggested that we should move to Teban (located at the 8th milestone of Tampines Road), where it was more suitable to breed chickens.

"One of my relatives was staying alone in a house at a rubber plantation (in Teban). I went on to buy (the house) from him at \$20. I bid for my share of the tontine (a rural credit scheme) and then pulled down the house to rebuild it.

"(At Kangkar), our house had a dirt floor. When I shifted (to Teban), I decided it would save me much trouble if I had cement flooring instead. A bag of cement cost 40 cents at that time, and we used 12 bags of cement for the house's flooring. Our neighbours often remarked: 'You must be rich to afford cement flooring for your new house!'

"If you went to the rural areas, most houses in the plantations had dirt floors. Many (early Chinese immigrants) would only stay in Singapore for two to three years before returning to China. (Because they were here temporarily), they used wooden crates for dining tables ... (and) coconut husks for stools.

"The living conditions here (were) still better than in China. At least we could afford to have rice. When I was staying in Teban, I could get over forty katis of rice for one dollar, and 50 katis of coarse rice for another dollar. With two dollars I could buy so much (there) that I could not carry the rice back.

"We did not have bread at that time - only porridge for breakfast and lunch, and rice for dinner. Sometimes I would buy a few cents (of fish). I could (afford) a few fish and vegetables: four cents for one kati of *cai xin* (Chinese Flowering Cabbage) and two cents for one kati of *kangkong* ("water convolvulus" in Malay)."



A village in Tampines, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs

# NATURAL HERITAGE



*The mouth of Sungei Tampines and its swampy surrounds, 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.

Since the colonial era, the natural heritage of Tampines has been subject to the changing mores of development, culture and society. These shifting tides have transformed the ecology and physical environment of the area through forest clearance, land reclamation, the proliferation of plantations and quarries and, in modern times, the development of residential towns.

## EARLY LANDSCAPES AND TEMPINIS TREES

The coastal proximity of Tampines and the presence of rivers including Sungei Tampines and Sungei Api Api meant that its landscape, before the advent of human settlement, was a profusion of mangroves, mudflats, freshwater swamp forests and lowland Dipterocarp woods. Its inland areas were dotted mainly with Dipterocarp trees, the most common forest type in pre-colonial Singapore, while swamp forests and mangroves accompanied the winding paths of the rivers.

Formerly, the coastline of Tampines ran east from the mouth of Sungei Blukar. However, land reclamation in the 1980s has since



*Two men fishing in Sungei Tampines, 1929*  
Collection of National Museum of Singapore, Courtesy of National Heritage Board

extended this coastline out to sea, with the old Pasir Ris strip of beach originally in the vicinity of today's Pasir Ris Farmway.

The reclamation also altered a number of waterways in the area. While Sungei Tampines and Sungei Api Api still remain, other smaller rivers have been filled in. These include Sungei Sembilang, Sungei Haji Isa, Sungei Kecek, Sungei Kadut and Sungei Taib to the east of Sungei Blukar, as well as the former tributaries of Sungei Tampines, Sungei Lubok Gatah and Sungei Prapat.

Like Kranji, Changi and a number of other places in Singapore, Tampines is named after a species of tree, known locally in Malay as the Tempinis (*Streblus elongatus*, previously also known as *Sloetia sideroxylon* and colloquially referred to as the Riau ironwood). This tree, which takes up to 30 years to mature and can grow up to 30 metres in the wild, became economically valuable and thus was much coveted during the 19th century.

The *Journal for the Society for Arts* from 1884 described Tempinis wood as:

*"Very hard, close-grained, red-coloured, long-fibred, and tough wood. Well adapted for beams of every description; white ants and other insects do not touch it. Used largely for bridge piles in fresh or salt water; considered one of the most lasting timbers."*

There was a rich supply of Tempinis trees in this area, and to colonial and local entrepreneurs, this might have appeared to be an inexhaustible natural bounty. The numerous uses for Tempinis wood and the poor resource management policies of the colonial authorities combined to make the plunder of the forests here an extremely profitable affair.

In the late 1880s, Sir Henry Ridley, in his capacity as director of the Botanic Gardens and the former Forestry Department, requested for one of the last remaining plots of primary forest in Tampines to be designated as a forest reserve. The colonial government refused and the former Land Office continued to lease out the land at rates that that took neither the value of Tempinis timber nor its long-term sustainability into consideration.

Ridley later noted that this plot of primary forest was eventually leased to a group of Malay businessmen under the pretext of vegetable farming, and the Tempinis trees there were completely harvested and sold at great profit. By 1900, Ridley wrote that Tempinis trees, which were "doubtlessly plentiful fifty years ago", were now "either very scarce or quite



*Tempinis tree leaves are distinguished by the unequal proportions of their leaves at the base area, 2017*  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



*The hanging catkins (flower clusters) of the Tempinis tree, 2009*  
Courtesy of National Parks Board

extinct." Interestingly, Ridley's own residence in the Singapore Botanic Gardens, the historic Burkill Hall, was also constructed in 1868 with elegant roof beams each made from a single trunk of the Tempinis tree.

Nearly a century later, after Singapore's independence and the development of Tampines Town in the late 1970s, community leaders sought to reconnect with the district's heritage by planting Tempinis trees. However, the number of Tempinis trees remaining in Singapore at the time were few and far between and the Tampines Town Council was then reportedly looking to purchase trees from Malaysia or Indonesia.



Tempinis trees were eventually obtained in the 1990s, including saplings grown locally by the Housing & Development Board's (HDB) horticulture services section, and planted across the town. The trees planted then included those at the Tampines Tree Garden, off Tampines Street 33, and within the compound of the Tampines Chinese Temple at Tampines Street 21.

The repopulation of Tempinis trees in the town that bears its name has continued to the present day, and they can now be found along streets, in parks as well as across other public spaces. The National Parks Board (NParks) also lists two Tempinis trees that have been marked as Heritage Trees at Changi and on St John's Island.



A Tempinis tree at Sun Plaza Park, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

## WILD TAMPINES

### Wildlife migration

Separated from the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula by the Strait of Johor, Tampines and the areas surrounding it have long served as bridges for wildlife migration. In the 19th century, tigers (*Panthera tigris jacksoni*, more

commonly known as the Malayan tiger) were thought to have crossed the Johor Strait using Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong as stepping stones, before landing on the sandy shores of Punggol, Tampines and Changi.

Henry Ridley wrote that the tigers came to Singapore to breed, with cubs being born early in the year. The forested areas in Tampines and Changi were said to be favoured environments for these predators, which also roamed around other rural locations including Bukit Timah, Pasir Panjang and Pandan.

Plantation workers and other residents in rural areas fell prey to these feline predators, and exaggerated tales of tigers in Singapore began to gain attention across the world through newspapers and magazines, thus giving rise to the urban legend that tigers killed a person a day on the island.

Tigers were reported to occasionally raid Clearwater Dairy Farm in Tampines to carry off calves in the late 1800s, and such reports of tiger sightings brought hunting enthusiasts such as George Owen, superintendent of the Singapore Fire Brigade, and businessman Daniel Maw to the area.

An observer noted that in 1906, Tampines Road was "little more than a sandy cart track", with a "dilapidated notice thereabouts which read 'Beware of Tigers'". By the 1930s, however, the tiger population in Singapore had already been decimated by hunting and they ceased to be a threat to the human population.

Besides tigers, colonial game hunters also took aim at flying wildlife in rural areas such as Tampines. Recalling leisure pursuits in the early 20th century, a writer for *The Straits Times* noted:

*"Another cheap amusement in those days was shooting. A gun-licence cost only 50 cents and a game-licence an additional 50. Snipe and teal (types of wild birds) were to be had in quantity in their season, especially in the neighbourhood of Tampenis."*

The mangroves and swamp forests of Tampines were environments rich in biodiversity, and other wildlife observed here before the modern era included the Raffles' Banded Langur (*Presbytis femoralis femoralis*), one of only three non-human primates found in Singapore. Today, the north-eastern coast, including Pasir Ris, Lorong Halus and Punggol, continues to serve as a bridge for migratory wildlife.



A young Malayan tiger, 1900s  
Lim Kheng Chye Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



A tiger hunt in colonial Singapore, 1890s  
Collection of National Museum of Singapore, Courtesy of National Heritage Board

### The Singapore Pet Farm and a panther on the prowl

Even as the human footprint in Tampines expanded and plantations and villages took the place of natural habitats, the district continued to be associated with wildlife well into the 1970s. One reason for this association was the presence of the Singapore Pet Farm on Elias Road, which operated as a quarantine station and wildlife export business.

Started by animal trapper and businessman Christopher Wee in 1969, the farm took in wildlife captured from around the region and nursed them to good health before exporting

the animals to private buyers and zoos in England, Holland and Japan. Animals including lions, tigers, kangaroos, honey bears, birds and rare reptiles such as the white cobra passed through this three-acre farm, which was also a major supplier to the Jurong Bird Park and the Singapore Zoological Gardens.

During their time at the farm, some of these animals even became part of the community – an elephant named Bala was said to be popular with the residents of Tampines before it was sold to the Great Royal Circus of India. The farm also ran exhibitions at amusement parks such as Great World and New World.

Despite the proliferation of plantations and kampongs, the rural environment of Tampines in the 1970s still had enough pockets of woods for wildlife to roam. It was therefore unsurprising when reports surfaced about a panther on the loose in Tampines. These reports of sightings by villagers went unheeded, with snake catcher S. Subramaniam telling the *New Nation* newspaper in 1975:

*"People elsewhere ... ridiculed me when I said that a panther had been stalking the area, eating wild dogs and farm chickens. It however seldom neared man. I had a shock when I first saw the beast – about the size of a large Alsatian dog – in the bushes. I thought it would attack me, but it ran off. Then when I went near the swamps, I saw it again on three occasions. I also saw its pugmarks near the seaside. Some of the villagers have also seen it, but they have left it alone."*

The panther began to make headlines in June 1975 when it appeared near farms at Jalan Ang Siang Kong and near Kampong Pasir Ris, killing scores of chickens and ducks. Police warned residents not to throw stones at the panther, and to stay indoors during the night when the panther would prowl for food. A game hunter was even brought from Malaysia by the Singapore Pet Farm, but he failed to trap the animal.

After a 24-day search involving more than 100 police, farmers and game hunters, the panther was finally corralled on a ship at Tanjong



Rhu shipyard. Spotted by a surveyor and two shipyard workers near the ship's lower deck fuel tank, the panther held off an attempt by police to flush it out with teargas. A team from the Singapore Zoo soon arrived, and after more than six hours, the panther was tranquilised and transported to the zoo.

While *The Straits Times* referred sensationally to a "reign of terror" by the panther, investigations by the Singapore Pet Farm and the *New Nation* revealed a sad story of wildlife smuggling. The panther, known as Buntor, had been caught in southern Thailand and then smuggled to Singapore in a crate on a cargo vessel. The crudely made crate was found by police in Bedok, and it was revealed that Buntor had been abandoned by a smuggler after several local animal dealers declined to buy it for \$500. Starved and stressed, the panther prowled the farms of Tampines and other places in the north-east before being captured.

With multiple sightings of other big cats in Singapore during the 1970s, Buntor the panther was unlikely to be the only victim of smugglers. Christopher Wee, the director of the Pet Farm, said of the situation then:

*"Smugglers, either from Indonesia or Thailand, bring in the animals because they know they can sell them illegally here without much difficulty. In the past, animals are known to have been shipped here without proper food and water. They are sold half-starved to dealers who think only of making a quick profit."*

### MANGROVES AND PARKS

Mangroves have long helped define the character and culture of the Tampines area. Kampong residents used the Bakau Pasir (*Rhizophora stylosa*) and Perepat (*Sonneratia alba*) mangrove timbers to construct kelongs and boats, while the Api Api tree (*Avicennia*) lent its name to the eponymous river. However, much of the mangrove environment did not survive into the 21st century as they were cleared to make way for the fish farming

industry in the 1960s and the development of Tampines Town in the late 1970s.

Nevertheless, elements of Tampines' mangrove heritage are still present. During the development of Pasir Ris Town in the mid-1980s, some five hectares of mature mangrove forest were preserved. Today, this patch of preserved forest and newly planted mangroves are part of Pasir Ris Park, which Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines both run through.

Wooden walkways and cycling trails allow visitors to explore more than 20 species of mangrove plants and trees. These include Api Api Putih (*Avicennia alba*), Bakau Pasir as well as the rare and locally endangered Kacang-kacang (*Aegiceras corniculatum*). The mangroves also harbour a rich diversity of wildlife which include otters, mudskippers, fiddler crabs and jungle fowl (*Gallus gallus*, from which domesticated chickens are descended).



Sun Plaza Park, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Sited close to residential flats in Pasir Ris Town, the mangroves in Pasir Ris Park provide a fine synthesis of both natural and built environments. The experience of mangrove restoration gained by NParks and other government agencies here has also been applied to other parts of Singapore including Pulau Semakau.

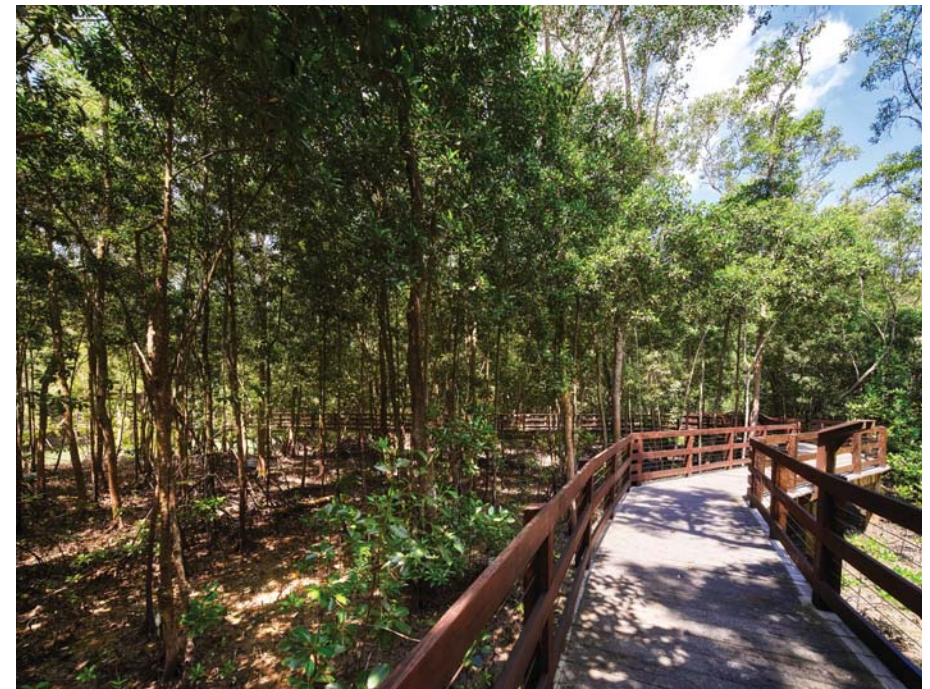
Since the 1980s, a number of other parks and green spaces have been constructed in Tampines. Sun Plaza Park, with its amphitheatre, is geared towards community activities, while the now-closed Tampines Bike Park had a 13-kilometre-long mountain bike trail and the only BMX trail in Singapore. Azman Omar (b. 1969), who is part of Tuah BMX Racing Club, remembered spending long hours at the park:

*"The BMX trail was very well maintained and one of the best in the region. Parents from Johor Bahru would even bring their children to use this track."*

*I used to train there with my Tuah BMX Racing Club from 9am until 5pm when the track closed. It was like our second home, and we had a lot of fun times there."*



Azman Omar (second from the left) and members of the Tuah BMX Racing Club at the former Tampines Bike Park, undated  
Courtesy of Azman Omar



Pasir Ris Park's mangroves, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



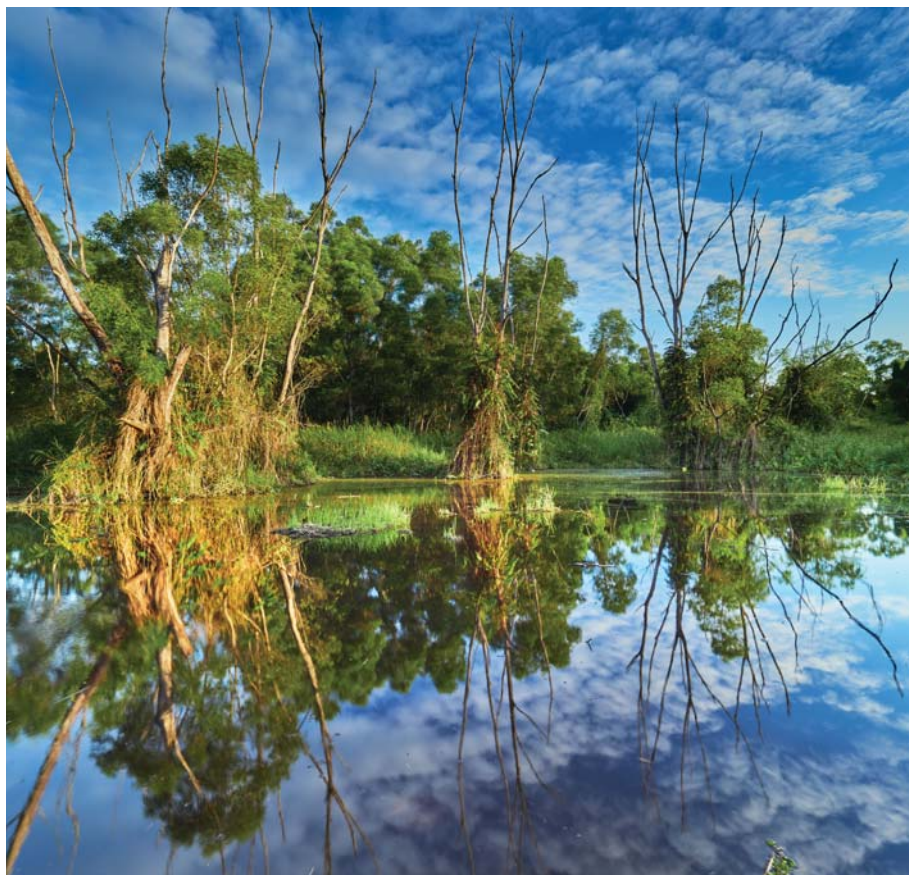
On the other hand, Tampines Eco Green is a living showcase for flora and fauna within an urban setting. While still a managed space, Eco Green is less of a manicured garden and recalls the natural environment of the kampong days. A Tampines resident, Toh Nan Li (b. 1981), noted:

*“The park is a rare gem of what’s left of the heavily developed eastern side. It is a haven that you cannot find elsewhere in Singapore, especially the beautiful misty scenery after the rain.”*

There are a number of natural habitats within the 36.5-hectare Eco Green, including marshes, secondary forests and freshwater ponds. The trees and plants introduced here by NParks were selected for their plentiful nectar

and fruit production, so as to draw more birds, insects and other wildlife. Some 70 species of birds (including the White-bellied Sea Eagle and Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker), 13 species of dragonflies, 12 species of butterflies and 32 types of spiders have been recorded here.

Framed as a space for nature-based recreation and education, Eco Green also includes features such as a compost-producing toilet, walking paths surfaced with Zoysia grass and green swales (vegetation that acts as a natural drainage system to trap particulate pollutants). The park is also left unlit at night to minimise wildlife disturbance, while dead trees are allowed to remain in place to provide nesting sites for birds.



Tampines Eco Green, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

## KAMPONG DAYS

### TAMPINES ROAD, VILLAGES AND BOUNDARIES

Tampines Road winds through a large area of Singapore’s north-eastern and eastern regions. From where Kovan is today, Tampines Road branches off from Upper Serangoon Road and runs through Defu Industrial Park before looping around the northern end of Paya Lebar Airport to arrive at Tampines. Before Tampines Town was constructed in the late 1970s, the road extended further eastwards until it met Changi.

In the past, most villagers living along this thoroughfare considered themselves to be part of one large Tampines district. This was likely due to the road’s name and the way it connected many kampongs. For these kampong residents, it was Kovan, popularly known as Lak Kor Jiok (“6th milestone” in Teochew), which functioned as the main commercial hub. It drew villagers from kampongs further north and east, and fishermen from Punggol and Tampines also made the journey from their villages to sell their catch. Eddie Peh (b. 1955), who lived in Kampong Teban, recalled:

*“People from Punggol and the kampongs in Tampines would go to Kovan. If you wanted shoes there was a Bata shop. There was also a photo studio and we would buy new clothes for Chinese New Year there.”*

Florence Neo (b. 1965), who grew up in a kampong near Hun Yeang Village, added:

*“Lak Kor Jiok was like a town to us, with all the facilities like the Tian Tian Bookshop, the clinic at Lim Ah Pin Road and many other shops.”*

Bus services from town also terminated at the 6th milestone, and passengers had to continue their journey eastwards on pirate taxis and privately-owned buses. The latter services were usually operated by Chinese-owned



An aerial view of Tampines showing a patchwork of plantations, kampongs and quarries, 1959  
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 transport terminus for Tampines bus services at the 6th milestone of Tampines Road, 1955  
F W York Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

firms such as the Katong-Bedok, Easy, and Paya Lebar Bus companies. Heading east, one would encounter Kampong Jalan Haji Karim at the 7½ milestone and Teck Hock Village at the 7¾ milestone. Today, the area where these kampongs were formerly located is part of Defu Industrial Estate.



Yvonne Siow (b. 1938), a former teacher at Tampines Primary School in the 1960s and 1970s, detailed the journey to Tampines Avenue at the 9¾ milestone from the 6th milestone transport terminus:

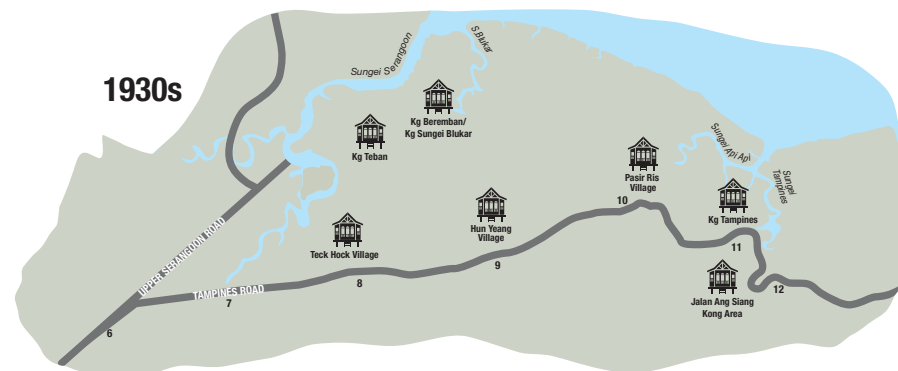
*“There were school buses, little vans, with one reserved for teachers. They would pick us up at the 6th milestone and fetch us to the school. When one person was late, all of us would be late! The journey would take 20 to 25 minutes on the narrow, winding Tampines Road, which was then only two lanes wide.”*

*“People would take the bus from town to Lak Kor Jio (6th milestone), and try to take a pirate taxi from there. The fare cost between 30 and 50 cents, and there would usually be at least two or three taxis waiting for customers.”*

*“Of course, they would wait to get as many people into their taxis as possible and not all the pirate taxis would take people who wanted to travel deep into the kampongs, as they would have trouble finding a customer on the way back. So some people resorted to hitching a lift from cars or lorries going in.”*

### KAMPONGS IN TAMPINES

The kampongs in Tampines were spread across a large area, with some villages sited near the mouths of Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines in the north and others located deeper inland, such as Hun Yeang Village. The following are some of the kampongs that could be found in Tampines from the early 1800s to the 1980s.



An illustration showing where some of kampongs in Tampines were located in the 1930s  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

### Kampong Teban, Kampong Beremban and Kampong Sungei Blukar

Located just near the 8th milestone of Tampines Road, Kampong Teban could be accessed via Lorong Baling, Lorong Halus and Jalan Teban. Although it was recorded in 19th century colonial maps as a Malay village, the kampong had a mixed population of Hokkiens, Teochews and Malays by the 1960s.

In its vicinity was a community centre built by the Singapore Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1958, as well as the Chinese-medium Yuh Cheng School. Roger Peh (b. 1957), who lived in Kampong Teban in the 1960s and is the brother of Eddie Peh, recalled:

*“We were in a part of the kampong (cluster) known as Meng Chiang Hng. Most of the Hokkiens stayed near the front of Lorong Baling, while the Teochews lived nearer to Sungei Serangoon where they anchored their sampans (small wooden boats), and the Malays stayed deeper inside. Most of the Hokkiens reared cows, while the Teochews were fishermen.”*

Sitting on the eastern bank of Sungei Serangoon, Kampong Teban also had a small jetty where barges carrying granite from the quarries of Pulau Ubin would unload their cargoes. Due to its proximity to these granite quarries, the villagers of Kampong Teban would hear detonations whenever explosives were used in the quarries.

To the north-east of Kampong Teban lay Kampong Beremban and Kampong Sungei Blukar. The latter took its name from Sungei Blukar which still exists today, although its neighbouring rivers Sungei Sembilang and Sungei Haji Isa have been filled in during the redevelopment of the area. Both kampongs were once accessible by Lorong Halus and Lorong Lumut.



The Peh family's house in Kampong Teban, 1960s  
Courtesy of Albert Peh



A photograph of the Peh siblings at Kampong Teban.  
From left: Troy, Albert (on the tricycle), Patrick (hidden), Roger and Eddie, 1960s.  
Courtesy of Albert Peh



Kampong Teban, 1986  
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

### Hun Yeang Village

While Tampines Road was re-aligned to accommodate the northern end of Paya Lebar Airport's runway in the early 1950s, Tampines Avenue roughly followed the course of the original road as it was first constructed in 1847.

The intersection of Tampines Avenue, Jalan Sam Kongs, Hun Yeang Road and the now expunged Jalan Songsong formed a natural hub at the 9¾ milestone of Tampines Road. This was where Hun Yeang Village and the now defunct Tampines Veterinary Centre were formerly located. The latter was opened in 1963 by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, and was built by the government to help farmers in the area reduce their production costs and increase their output of animal and vegetable produce. Albert Peh (b. 1965) recollected:

*“There was an informal market set up next to the Veterinary Centre, where villagers could trade live pigs and poultry with outsiders. There was also an old man who would walk a huge male pig around the villages, and people paid him to have their sows impregnated. The elders in the kampong always warned their kids that if they didn't study, they would end up as a kan ter ko ('pig breeder' in Hokkien).”*

The village was named after Khoo Hun Yeang, a Penang-born businessman licensed to sell opium and spirits in Singapore, Johor and Sarawak in the early 1900s. Having started in his family's business, Khoo later set up his own company, Chin Lee and Co., and dealt in tin and other commodities.

Khoo also owned a number of plantations in Singapore and Malaya, including a 206-acre plantation in Tampines that was purchased for 104,000 Straits dollars in 1913. The former Rural Board named Hun Yeang Road after him in 1941, and part of the road still exists today along with a nearby row of shophouses that used to be part of the village.

A cluster of Chinese temples can be found in this area today, with the first being constructed in the 1970s (more details



about this temple cluster can be found on p. 54). Former kampong resident Henry Ong (b. 1965) recalled:

*“Where Jalan Songsong met Tampines Road, that was an accident-prone area as there was a big bend, so they put a Tua Pek Kong temple there.”*

The area near Jalan Songsong was also popularly known as Ti Kong Tua (“big Jade Emperor” in Hokkien) in reference to the Jade Emperor Temple located there. This temple was known for its *wayang* (“street opera” in Malay) stage and its organisation of street opera performances.

Moving south from Hun Yeang Village, there were small kampong clusters that led towards Bedok. Part of this area, which was interspersed with sand quarries and cemeteries, has become today’s Tampines Town. In the past, the roads that connected Tampines with Bedok included Jalan Bumbun Selatan, Jalan Sam Kongsu and Hun Yeang Road, as well as Jalan Lembah Bedok.



*Crowds at the night opening of Tampines Veterinary Centre, 1963*  
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



*Ti Kong Tua, at the 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> milestone of Tampines Road, undated*  
Courtesy of Koh Eng Hwa



*The row of shophouses at Hun Yeang Road that used to be part of the former Hun Yeang Village, 2017*  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

### Kampong Tampines and Jalan Ang Siang Kong area

Just past the 11th milestone of Tampines Road, Jalan Guan Choon and Jalan Ang Siang Kong led to a number of villages along Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines. These villages included Kampong Tampines, which was founded by Javanese and Bugis settlers, and was only accessible via Jalan Guan Choon.

According to a newspaper article published in *Berita Harian* in 1986, the village was isolated due to its location and housed just seven families in the early 20th century. After the Japanese Occupation, the village became more developed and grew to encompass some 40 families. The kampong’s mosque, Masjid Jihad, sat in the centre of the village. Aside from its religious role, the mosque also served as a community space.

Hajah Sapiah Osman (b. 1913), who moved to Kampong Tampines in 1918, recalled the village then:

*“At the time, the kampong was surrounded by forested areas ... covered with bushes, rubber, coconut and Tempinis trees. The atmosphere could be spooky. Not only was there no (piped) water supply or electricity, but there were also a lot of monkeys around, and they could be scary.”*



*Village houses in Tampines, 1960s*  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs



*A kampong in Tampines, 1980*  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

*“The rivers (Sungei Tampines and Sungei Api Api) were a source of food for us. Most of the early residents here were fishermen, and fish, clams, mussels, prawns and other seafood were readily available from the rivers. But (in the early days), we could not sell the catch beyond the village as it was difficult to transport it out of the kampong, which was more than a mile in from the main road through a forested area and undulating terrain. We also had difficulties finding buyers.”*

Consequently, instead of selling the fish they caught, the villagers sold rubber sap and coconuts for income, while others worked in the plantations of Tampines.

Kampong Tampines, with its natural beauty preserved by its relative inaccessibility, also served as a backdrop for several Malay films. These included *Pusaka Pontianak* (1965, “The Pontianak Legacy”), *Siti Muslihat* (1962, “Siti’s Tricks”), *Hantu Jerangkong* (1957, “Ghost Skull”), *Antara Dua Darjat* (1960, “Between Two Classes”), *Semerah Padi* (1956, “Red Rice Village”) and *Batu Belah Batu Bertangkap* (1959, “Stone Trap”).

Jalan Guan Choon, which led to Kampong Tampines, was named after the company of Teo Kim Eng, a tobacco wholesaler and plantation owner who owned much of the land in the area (more details about Teo can be found on p. 32). Jalan Ang Siang Kong meanwhile derived its name from the Hokkien name of the deity Hong Xian Da Di, enshrined in the Soon Hin Ancient Temple, which was founded here in the mid-19th century. Today, the temple is a constituent of the Tampines Chinese Temple.



## THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

Following the fall of Singapore in February 1942, the occupying Japanese forces launched *Dai Kensho* ("great inspection" in Japanese), which was later known as *Sook Ching* ("purge" in Mandarin). During this period, Japanese forces set up a series of screening centres across Singapore to root out suspected anti-Japanese elements among the population.

According to Ching Foo Kun (b. 1912), one such screening centre was located at a large field off Tampines Road. Ching, who lived in a nearby village, recalled being asked to head to the screening centre at about 6am in the morning. Four to five Japanese soldiers had erected two temporary stages outside an attap house. After a delay of about five hours, the Japanese commenced the screening process by assembling their suspects in ranks of four. Ching recalled the relief he felt after being released with a paper confirming that he had passed the inspection:

*"At that point in time, if you were nervous or made any move that seemed suspicious, the Japanese would seize you immediately. I was considered lucky to escape unharmed. I noticed that in some of the groups assembled, one out of four men was not released. I told myself that there was no use worrying, and somehow I managed to pass the inspection. There was a palpable sense of relief when the ordeal was over."*

Between 1942 and 1945, the Japanese forces sought to ease persistent food supply problems by farming the many acres of rural land in Tampines. They bartered with existing farmers and also moved locals from other parts of the island to Tampines to increase food production. Each new arrival was given a small plot of land to grow vegetables like cabbage, tapioca and sweet potatoes as well as various beans, chillies and fruits. A portion of their harvests had to be handed over to the Japanese, who provided rice and other goods in return.

Peter Wee (b. 1938) was a child when his family moved to Tampines during the Japanese Occupation. He recalled how different the rural environment appeared compared to his previous neighbourhood of Katong, where



A mass screening centre during the Japanese Occupation, 1942-1945  
Collection of National Museum of Singapore, Courtesy of National Heritage Board



A farmer working on his vegetable farm, 1960s  
Primary Production Department Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

there were terraced houses, streetlights and a larger population:

*"We seemed to have been transplanted in a new world altogether. The whole countryside was covered with a motley of green and brown - green plots of cultivated land irregularly demarcated by little brown lanes, and brown patches of ground surrounding the brown houses of the tenant farmers. These houses ... were few and far between, separated by vegetable farms."*

Under the orders of the Japanese, some of the rubber, coconut and other fruit plantations that covered large swathes of land in Tampines were converted to grow staple foods needed for subsistence. Tay Chin Tian (b. 1897), who lived in Kampong Teban, remembered:

*"When things had settled down, the Japanese gave us some land. After they had cleared the rubber trees, we were given some land to grow crops. So one of my daughters and I started to work the land. It was hard work, we had to use the changkol ('hoe' in Malay) and slowly dig out the roots of the rubber trees. So we slowly dug the soil and planted tapioca and vegetables."*

Other vegetables grown in the area included *kangkong* ("water convolvulus" in Malay), cabbage, *bayam* ("spinach" in Malay), tomatoes, brinjal, ladies' fingers, sweet potatoes and chilli. Some farmers also tended to ponds full of *ikan sepat* ("gourami" in Malay), *ikan sembilang* ("catfish" in Malay) and *luay he* ("toman fish" in Hokkien).

With staples like rice and cooking oil in short supply, the villagers of Tampines had to adapt, with tapioca replacing rice as a vital part of their diet. Households also toiled to extract coconut oil for cooking, even as they struggled to produce enough vegetables and other foodstuffs for both themselves and to meet the demands of the Japanese authorities.

Chng Nguan Im (b. 1926), who lived in Kampong Teban, recalled:

*"We planted tapioca for our own consumption and also ground it to feed chickens. While we were in the garden planting tapioca and other vegetables, my father would be making tapioca rice (mixed with) broken rice grains. It was miserable work, the whole family worked from morning till night. We also had to process the tapioca and sweet potatoes into flour, and grind coconuts to make coconut oil."*

To ensure their own survival and food supply, villagers hid vegetables and animals from the authorities, and traded by night on the black market. Tay said:

*"I brought some things to sell at Kangkar, (other people) brought papayas and tapioca. If we did not do some selling in the black market, we would have not been able to get by."*

*"We also raised pigs ... we would bring piglets to our neighbour. He would slaughter the pigs secretly in the night, and sold the meat to our neighbours cheaply. Otherwise, we would not have the chance to eat meat. We also reared chickens and ducks, and sold them secretly."*

Baey Lian Peck (b. 1931), whose father owned a number of farms and plantations in Tampines during this period, recalled:

*"We lived in Jalan Kembangan before the war. My father knew the British couldn't hold (off the Japanese invasion of Malaya), so he bought 42*

*acres of farmland in Tampines as well as belongs in Bedok. The Japanese were coming, so the best thing was to cultivate the land.*

*"Later on, somebody came with an interpreter, said that the Japanese wanted half of our produce every fortnight - our chickens, eggs, vegetables ... whatever we produced. They filled up (their trucks and left). But to our surprise, two or three days later they would (return with) goods like cloth, rice, sugar - things that we couldn't get in Singapore (at the time). It was more or less an exchange.*

*"At the beginning of the Japanese Occupation, my old man was just trying to survive and provide food (for our family), but there was no avenue to sell our farm produce. So we were practically giving it away - vegetables, eggs and chickens, and fish from Bedok. Whatever we had left over we distributed to the villagers in Kampong Kembangan. Some of them still remember this (years after). These are things you never expect, but when it happens it touches your heart very much."*



Rice rationing during the Japanese Occupation, 1942-1945  
Collection of National Museum of Singapore, Courtesy of National Heritage Board



A ration permit for necessities such as rice and cooking oil issued during the Japanese Occupation, 1942-1945  
Collection of National Museum of Singapore, Courtesy of National Heritage Board



## THE JAPANESE CONNECTION

In the 1920s and 1930s, fishermen from Okinawa and other parts of Japan made up a sizeable portion of Singapore's fishing industry. The number of Japanese fishermen operating in the waters around Singapore and based on the island hit a peak of 1,752 in 1936, accounting for an estimated 36% of all fishermen in Singapore. The Japanese also accounted for significant proportions of fish consumed in Singapore during this period, including 41% of the local market in 1937.

Japanese fishermen mainly employed the muro-ami fishing technique, where divers herded fish towards large nets deployed from power boats. While more productive than local fishing methods, this technique also causes great damage to coral reefs.

The Japanese fishermen resided mostly in villages on the eastern part of Singapore such as Siglap. Another village populated mainly by Japanese was also established on Tampines Road in the early 1920s to rear chickens, pigs and ducks for the consumption of the fishermen.

The Japanese were also known to work in other industries in the area, including the coconut plantations. A Japanese temple was also built in Tampines, and a Singapore Tampenis Japanese Association was set up, which operated until 1929.

The Japanese presence in Singapore's fishing industry began to wane in the late 1930s as many Chinese here boycotted Japanese products after the inception of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Suspicious of potential espionage and the use of Japanese fishing boats for military purposes, the British colonial authorities also began to revoke fishing licenses for Japanese companies from the same period onwards.

## POST-WAR KAMPONG LIFE

### Kampong entrepreneurs

Beyond the common occupations of farming and manual labour, kampong villagers sought economic opportunities wherever they could. Many families ran cottage industries, from making beancurd to selling packets of *nasi lemak* (rice flavoured with coconut milk), while others embarked on more enterprising ventures. One such entrepreneur was Lim Khng, who saved up enough money from farming pigs and chickens to acquire a large plot of land near Hun Yeang Village. Her granddaughter Florence Neo (b. 1965) related:

*"My Ah Ma was quite entrepreneurial and very hardworking. She stayed at the 12th milestone, near Loyang, and bought over the rights to collect leftover food from the British military camps in the area. She used these leftovers to feed her pigs, sold them and eventually made enough money to buy a big piece of land that cost her 18,000 Malayan dollars in 1948."*

*"When I was growing up in Tampines in the 1960s, I remember my grandmother renting out parcels of land for small factories. There was one factory making curry powder, one doing garment printing, another making kim zua (paper notes used in ancestor worship prayers) and another producing cement. My parents were rearing chickens and selling eggs, while the family also sold sand from my grandmother's land."*

As Lim Khng's story shows, the residents of Tampines established and contributed to a rural economy that was characterised by diverse and entrepreneurial elements.



A cattle farm at Kampong Teban, 1986  
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



A fish farm in Tampines, 1980  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

Within the kampongs, some village clusters specialised in cattle herding, while others reared chickens, ducks and pigs. One cluster, near Hun Yeang Village, became known colloquially as Ter Ko Liao ("pig sty" in Hokkien), in reference to the pig breeding and trading that often took place in the area.

Other rural industries included small crocodile farms, such as one located off Jalan Bumbun Selatan, which sent their skins to tanneries for the production of leather. There were also rattan factories and fruit plantations, as well as many fish farms that later evolved into exporters of ornamental fish. In the 1970s, the former Primary Production Department announced plans to concentrate the 135 fish

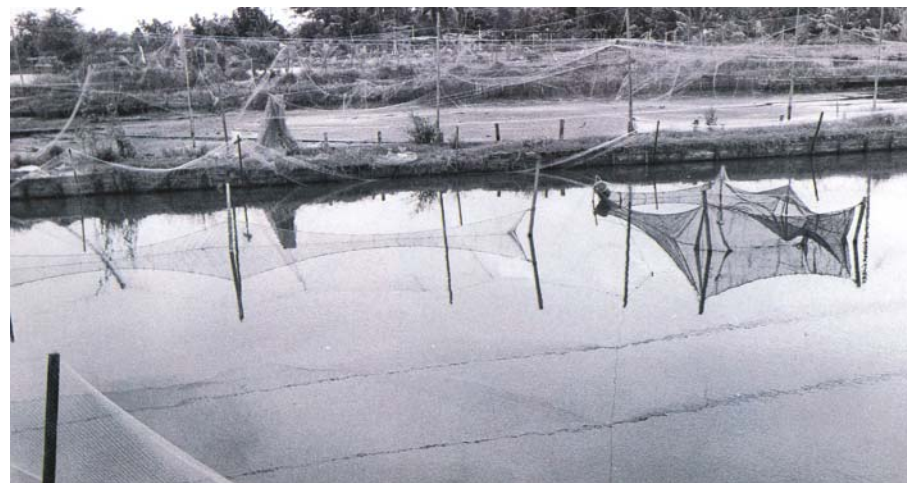
exporters in Tampines into a commercial aquarium centre. This eventually evolved into a 21.8-hectare breeding estate near the 7½ milestone of Tampines Road, which housed ornamental fish breeders affected by public development projects.

Roger Peh, who grew up in the village cluster known as Meng Chiang Hng at the outskirts of Kampong Teban, remembered working part-time for his neighbour who kept cows:

*"We would try to come home from school before 2pm, as that was when we had to let the cows out to the pond where they bathed. While they were in the pond, we would clear the dung, wash the cowshed and unload pineapple scraps that came from the cannery. Apparently, the cows gave better quality milk if they ate pineapples. For four hours of hard labour, we would receive \$1.20."*

Florence Neo, who lived near the 9½ milestone, recalled her daily duties at her family's chicken farm:

*"Every day, before going to school, I would have to feed the chickens. But what was more tiresome was having to wake up at 4am sometimes to bring the chickens to a poultry market at Or Kio (near Hougang Avenue 3 today)."*



A fishing pond in Tampines, 1980s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs





Lorries carrying sand from Koh Eng Hwa's family quarry, 1960s  
Courtesy of Koh Eng Hwa



A villager processing beancurd at Lorong Halus, 1985  
Quek Tiong Swee Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

From the 1960s, sand became a major revenue source as landowners set up quarries to service a nationwide boom in development and construction (more details about sand quarries can be found on p. 35). As a boy, Henry Ong (b. 1965) resided at Jalan Bumbun Selatan, roughly half an hour's walk in from the 9½ milestone, and helped out at his family's quarry:

*"We had a ticket system for tracking each lorry carrying sand out from the quarry. Sometimes, my grandfather would tell me to go out to the road, stand there and collect the tickets from the lorries. Each ticket would detail the name of the company buying the sand, the date, the lorry number and the amount of sand they bought. I would eyeball the amount of sand, but I wouldn't have been able to do anything even if the lorry just drove away!"*

Despite the various environmental issues caused by quarry operations, the sand from the Tampines quarries played a vital role in Singapore's urban transformation. Koh Eng Hwa (b. 1965), who lived at Ti Kong Tua (located at the 9¾ milestone), remembered

sand from his family's quarry being used in the construction of Toa Payoh Town, Changi Airport and the former Westin Stamford Hotel (now Swissotel The Stamford) in the 1980s:

*"Westin was then the tallest hotel in the world, so they needed to have very deep piling for the foundations. They had to have consistent loads of sand and granite arriving over 24 hours each day.*

*"It was almost non-stop and my father would have to go to the quarry at 2am or 3am to oversee the sand deliveries. As a child, I would sometimes follow him to see how the quarry operated."*

### Ulu Tampines

The remote, rural nature of Tampines meant that some villages lacked basic infrastructure and amenities. In 1958, a group of 40 women made the newspapers with their march to Singapore's Legislative Assembly to protest the lack of water supply to Kampong Teban. The wells that the 1,000 residents of the kampong depended on had been drained by a dry spell, and neither water mains nor standpipes had been installed.

By May 1958, the kampong residents had petitioned the government five times. After each petition, the former Rural Board would send lorries with containers of water but these trips would stop after a period of time. The fact that the villagers had to make their appeal for a basic necessity repeatedly reflected that rural kampongs in Tampines were often considered to be a peripheral concern for the authorities.

The construction of Paya Lebar Airport in the early 1950s and further works to extend the airport's runway from 11,000 to 13,000 feet in the 1970s also necessitated the resettlement of thousands of affected kampong residents, as Tampines Road had to be re-aligned to accommodate the northern end of the airport.

Some 315 families from Teck Hock Village, located near the 7¾ milestone of Tampines Road, were resettled in 1972 to accommodate the airport's expansion. The Peh family also remembered moving house multiple times around the Kampong Teban area in the 1960s because of sewage works and road extensions, before settling at Lorong Baling.

Even into the 1970s, when much of the rest of Singapore was being redeveloped, Tampines remained somewhat inaccessible and was considered *ulu*. Jimmy Ong (b. 1965) recalled:

*"My grandfather owned a provision shop on Tampines Avenue, near Tampines (Primary) School, and my family's house was on a small road off Tampines Avenue. (The immediate environment) was just forest and what people at the time called ang tor lor ('red dirt road' in Hokkien). We could give visitors our address, but*

*there was no way for them to tell exactly where we stayed. What usually happened was that we would go out to the school, wait for them and bring them in."*

Due to sparse traffic on Tampines Road after the 8th milestone or so, Ong was able, as a child, to learn driving by taking the wheel of his father's taxi:

*"I would accompany my dad sometimes and I learnt driving from the age of 10. Once we were near Tampines Avenue, he would say 'hwa chia loh' ('time to drive' in Hokkien) and I would drive the taxi home."*

As the distance between various kampongs and village clusters could be considerable, travelling hawkers and provision shop delivery services were a godsend for villagers. Albert Peh recollected:

*"Because we were living so far in from the main town (referring to the 6th milestone area or today's Kovan), there weren't many places where we could buy food. Thankfully, we had pushcart hawkers or people riding bicycles selling kacang puteh (a traditional snack consisting of roasted peas, peanuts and beans) or bread coming into the kampong."*



A postcard of a plane at Paya Lebar Airport preparing for take-off, 1960s  
National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board





Members of the Urban and Rural Services Consultative Committee visiting Tampines as part of a study to improve amenities across Singapore, 1964  
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Inside a village provision shop in Tampines, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs

Albert's brother, Eddie Peh, recalled how the villagers would wait eagerly for the mid-afternoon arrival of the *yong tau foo* (a Chinese dish consisting of pieces of beancurd and vegetables served dry or in soup) hawker:

*"The yong tau foo hawker would come at 3pm and all the kampong people would be waiting with their tiffin containers. Each piece of yong tau foo was five cents or 10 cents in the 1960s, now I say that's very cheap but last time it was very expensive to me. I couldn't afford to pick too many pieces!"*

These travelling hawkers were colloquially referred to as *chye chia* ("vegetable cars" in Hokkien, referring to grocery deliverymen) or *loti chia* ("bread cars" in Hokkien), and were the source of fond memories for former villagers like Jimmy Ong:

*"Some were motorcycles with sidecars and they would come with the horn (sounding) 'pau pau papu papu', selling jiam tau loti ('baguettes' in Hokkien) with kaya ('coconut jam' in Malay) and those triangular curry puffs. They were a real highlight for us."*

A well-known food haunt during the kampong era was Hun Yeang Village, which was a natural hive of activity because of its location near the intersection of several roads at the 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> milestone of Tampines Road. Ong, who lived in a house nearby, still retained vivid memories of the popular food haunt:

*"Near the community centre, there were several stalls by the roadside and the food there was famous to a lot of people in Tampines. There was ter huang kiam chye (pig's intestines and salted vegetable soup) and char kway teow (fried noodles with dark soya sauce). There was also a coffee shop that sold exotic meats like wild boar."*

*"People sat there to eat even though it was so dusty with many lorries carrying sand always going past, and the hawkers had to splash pails of water on the ground to flush away the dust."*

*"That place served much of the kampongs inside - (it was like) you better eat (here) before you go back, (because) inside bo mek kia jiaik liao ('there's nothing to eat' in Hokkien)."*

Jimmy's schoolmate in the 1970s, Henry Ong added:

*"If you go towards the 10th milestone, there's pretty much nothing (to eat) there. If you go in the opposite direction, there isn't much until you hit Or Kio at the 7th milestone. At Hun Yeang, the food stalls were small huts, not even a place you could lock up, just a zinc roof shelter and the tables were really run down, but it was homely to us."*

*"I also used to spend a lot of time at the Hun Yeang community centre - that was only place (for kampong residents) where you could learn to paint or learn music."*

Besides cooked food, grocery deliverymen also extended the reach of various small provision



A village provision shop in Tampines, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs



The former Raffles National Library's mobile library van, 1964  
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection,  
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

shops across Tampines, and appeared at particular times of the day at fixed locations where villagers would gather.

Although the 6th milestone (present-day Kovan) was the nearest commercial hub for Tampines villagers, a trip there was reserved mainly for special occasions such as Lunar New Year or a visit to the photo studio. Villagers looking to construct a new house or undertake renovation works would also buy materials such as attap and timber there.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a number of public health and educational initiatives used mobile stations to extend the reach of their services into rural areas like Tampines. In 1955, the Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association started a mobile clinic which was stationed at the 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> milestone of Tampines Road on Mondays and Thursdays.

The same location was also a stop point for a mobile children's library run by the then Raffles National Library. Housed in a cream-coloured former army bus, the mobile library was a gift from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to the Singapore Government, and stocked books in English, Malay, Tamil and Mandarin.

## COMMUNITY BONDS AND SIMPLE PLEASURES

Like most places in Singapore during this period, kampong residents enjoyed a community-centric culture, woven closely together through webs of extended family relations and mutual interdependence. As Jimmy Ong related:

*"In the kampong, when you shout, everyone can hear. I remember one day someone shouted 'robbery!', and all the uncles came out running with their changkols."*





Villagers from Ti Kong Tua (9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> milestone) in Tampines, undated  
Courtesy of Koh Eng Hwa



Villagers making "love letters" (a crispy sweet roll) in Tampines, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs

"Another time, I was with my cousins and we accidentally started a fire in an empty attap hut after having a barbecue inside. The house was on fire and someone called the fire brigade, and I ran out to the main road to wait for the fire engine.

"By the time it arrived however, the fire was already out. The whole kampong had come out and put the fire out with one pail of well water at a time. What I treasured most about the kampong days were the family values and the connections we had. There was a real sense of everybody being so close."

Another former kampong resident, Roger Peh, recalled the unspoken culture of relying and being able to depend on one's neighbours as part of daily kampong life:

"Our house was at 184 Lorong Baling, and it was the first house on the road into the kampong (Meng Chiang Hng, which was part of Kampong Teban). People inside had to ride their bicycles out to the bus stop, and they would all park their bicycles at our house. If my dad had charged five cents for every bicycle, he would have made a fortune – there was no need to work!"

The strong sense of camaraderie engendered by communal activities remains etched in the memories of Florence Neo, a former kampong resident:

"To me, kampong spirit means that whenever there is a need, everybody chips in to help. When my mum gave birth to me and my siblings, her neighbours came over and taught her what to cook and advised her what to eat."

This spirit of solidarity extended to strangers as well. With the Singapore Armed Forces using the rural lands of Tampines as training grounds in the 1960s and 1970s, there would often be soldiers in the area. Villagers would usually offer food to these soldiers whenever they encountered them, as Koh Eng Hwa remembered:

"We would hear the soldiers knocking on our doors in the night, and my aunt and my mum would cook bee hoon (vermicelli) with ter kah (pork trotters) and luncheon meat, and make Milo for them."

With leisure and recreation options being relatively limited, kampong residents of Tampines, such as Eddie Peh, often found satisfaction in simple pleasures:

"After school, my friends and I would go to other peoples' plantations and fruit orchards to steal rambutans, durians and mangosteens. We had plenty of our own trees, but other people's fruits tasted sweeter!

"We would also cut holes in the fence of Paya Lebar Airport to go in and catch grasshoppers, which could be sold to pet shops to feed birds. Each grasshopper, depending on the size, could be sold for between half a cent to two cents."



A child drawing water from a kampong well in Tampines, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs

Henry Ong remembered how the Tampines landscape held many diversions for curious children:

"Along Jalan Bumbun Selatan, there was a stretch of road that ran parallel to Paya Lebar Airport. We would lean on the airport's fence and watch the planes take off. Along this stretch, there would be fishing ponds all the way to Bedok, and many different types of fruit trees.

"The army used to train in the area as well. It was dangerous, but as kids we didn't know and we used to follow them around. When the soldiers left, we would go looking for the used bullets, open them up and play with the little gunpowder that was left."

Many of the villages in Tampines housed Chinese temples, and these temples held wayangs on the birthdays of deities or other special occasions. These performances drew large crowds of villagers both young and



The wayang stage at Ti Kong Tua in Tampines, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs

old, with lorries and cars sometimes lining Tampines Road during these celebrations. Albert Peh, who lived with his family in Kampong Teban, recalled:

"The annual wayang in our kampong was organised by the Tua Pek Kong temple near Lorong Baling and Lorong Halus. For us kids, we were most excited by the pushcarts that came with food, sweets and flavoured ice balls. There were also tikam tikam ('games of chance' in Malay) stalls, some with roulette wheels, and you could win toys or money."

Albert's brother, Roger Peh, remembered the action scenes of Hokkien wayangs most fondly:

"The organisers of the wayang were very fair – one year it would be Hokkien operas, the next year Teochew. We always preferred the Hokkien operas because the Hokkien ones had flying and fighting scenes, while the Teochew ones didn't!"

Zenith Theatre, at the 6½ milestone of Tampines Road (where the Fortune Park condominium is today), was the closest cinema for kampong residents. A number of Chinese films were screened there, with some shows stretching all the way until midnight. There were also open-air cinemas at various locations along Tampines Road, including at Jalan Ang Siang Kong, Kampong Teban and Hun Yeang Village.



### THE MILLIONAIRE WITH A *CHANGKOL*

Like many millionaires during the colonial era, tobacco businessman Teo Kim Eng owned large swathes of land especially in the Punggol and Tampines areas. However, his behaviour was less typical of wealthy landowners as he regularly tended to the land on his 100-acre estate in Tampines alongside his workers, and freely offered his villas and bungalows for community use.

Having arrived in Malaya at the age of 12, Teo later founded Chop Guan Choon, a tobacco wholesale business. He steadily acquired land in Tampines and Punggol, and eventually owned a string of rubber plantations.

Teo is perhaps best known for opening up the facilities on his estates (which included 10 bungalows and villas, a swimming pool and a dance hall) for use by community groups and local residents. In 1950, it was also reported that Teo owned one of the few private air-raid shelters in Singapore, which proved useful when Japanese bombs landed near his home during World War II.

A visit by a reporter to his estate off the 10th milestone of Tampines Road in 1947 found Teo labouring with a *changkol* alongside his workers, and it was said that hundreds of people visited his bungalows each weekend. Baey Lian Peck, who lived in Tampines in the 1940s, recalled:

*"The first time I went to Teo Kim Eng's mansion was with my brother. A man in a singlet was sweeping the floor. So we said, 'Ah Pek ('uncle' in Hokkien), we want to meet the owner.'*

*"He asked, 'What do you want with him?' We replied that wanted to swim in the pool, and he told us to go ahead. Later on we found out that he was the towkay ('business owner' in Hokkien), sweeping the floor. He was always very kind to allow us to swim there."*

In recognition of his prominence in the community and his land ownership, Teo Kim Eng Road in Eunos and Jalan Guan Choon (a now expunged road that led to Kampong Tampines) were named after Teo who passed away in 1955.

### Golden Palace Holiday Resort



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



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

For a brief span of years from the late 1960s, the Jalan Ang Siang Kong area off the 11th milestone of Tampines Road was home to an unusual landmark – a leisure resort known as Golden Palace Holiday Resort.

Set up in 1967, the 11-acre resort boasted a slew of leisure offerings, including the Golden Pagoda nightclub, a snack bar, a motel and a man-made lake where visitors could boat and fish. There were also two Chinese restaurants: the Golden Pagoda Restaurant and the Golden Palace Restaurant, with the former claiming to offer “unexcelled Cantonese and Shanghainese cuisine”.

Local and foreign performers such as the Indonesian pianist Moeljono Waneng Sworo headlined the resort's nightclub and drew crowds during its early years. However, the resort's business eventually dwindled as there were insufficient numbers of tourists and visitors to keep its operations profitable.

In 1971, disagreements within its board resulted in one of the directors applying to the High Court for a winding-up petition in 1971. The resort was put up for sale, and eventually purchased by the government for \$870,000 in 1973.

The site was turned over to the former Primary Production Department, which used the lake for commercial breeding experiments involving *udang galah* (“giant freshwater prawns” in Malay) and *soon hock* (“marble goby” in Hokkien). The lessons learned from these experiments were shared with local fish farmers and breeders.

### Keris Film Productions

Jalan Ampas in Balestier and East Coast Road, where Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Production and Cathay-Keris Films were respectively based, are important landmarks in the history of Singapore's movie industry. Tampines, too, can claim a slice of that history with movie producer Ho Ah Loke establishing Rimau Film Productions at the 9th milestone of Tampines Road in 1951.

A trained engineer, Ho had bought his first movie theatre in Ipoh in the 1920s at the age of 25. Having sold a chain of Malayan cinemas to the Shaws in 1934, he found the draw of the movies irresistible and established yet another chain of theatres.

In 1951, Ho partnered Gian Singh, a distributor of Hindustani movies, and ventured into film production. They set up Rimau Film Productions and constructed two tin sheds in Tampines to use as sets for their movies, which often highlighted aspects of Malayan life and culture, including local folklore and novels. Among those who worked at the Tampines studio was Wahid Satay, who started off in the production department before later gaining prominence as an actor.

After two films – *Bunga Percintaan* (1951, “Love Flower”) and *Untuk Sesuap Nasi* (1953, “For a Mouthful of Rice”) were produced, Rimau changed its name to Keris Film Productions.

In 1953, the company merged with Loke Wan Tho's Cathay Organisation to form Cathay-Keris Films, and a new production facility was set up at 532-D East Coast Road next to the Ocean Park Hotel.

The studio in Tampines continued to produce films, including 1954's *Irama Kaseh* (“Rhythm of Love”) which was written, directed and shot by Laurie Friedman. The aforementioned film is said to be one of the first Malay films made by an Englishman. The studio also produced another 1950s film titled *Taming of the Princess* which became the first Hokkien-medium movie shot in Singapore.

### EDUCATION DURING THE KAMPONG PERIOD

In the past, there were a number of Chinese-medium village schools in Tampines. These included Yuh Cheng School at Kampong Teban, Ho Seng School on Hun Yeang Road, Bin Sin School near the junction of Jalan Bumbun Selatan and Jalan Lembah Bedok, as well as Yook Min School past the 12th milestone of Tampines Road. A government-aided school, Yook Min was established in 1974 from an amalgamation of two private Chinese schools founded in the 1940s.



Ho Seng School, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs

The only English-medium school in the area was the former Tampines Primary School (not to be confused with the present-day school of the same name) on Tampines Avenue. Wong Hiong Boon (b. 1932), a teacher at the school in the 1950s, provided an insight into demographic changes in Tampines during the post-war period:



*"(At Tampines Primary School), there were children of people who worked in commercial houses (companies), clerks, wet market hawkers, sundry and food shop owners and barbers.*

*"The neighbourhood children spoke dialect and colloquial English. Because of the disruption during (World War II), some of the students were quite old. I was 19 or 20 years old and I was teaching students who were 15 or 16."*

Tampines Primary's growing popularity in the 1960s and 1970s reflected national trends in language and education as Singapore underwent rapid industrialisation and became increasingly connected to the global economy. As a result, proficiency in English became more important for a number of jobs and many Chinese and Malay kampong residents started to send their children to English-medium schools in the hope of securing a brighter future for them.

Yvonne Siow, who taught at Tampines Primary School for nearly two decades until its closure in 1983, remembered:

*"In the early years, the registration for Primary One was on a first-come, first-served basis. The first time I saw the registration exercise, I was shocked – there were rows and rows of people. I asked my friend: 'How is it that this ulu school can attract so many people?'"*

*"She told me that it was like this every year. Parents queued overnight to secure places for their children, and the school staff also stayed late to hand out numbered cards for the registration."*

Eddie Peh, who moved to Tampines Primary from a Chinese-medium school in the 1960s, recalled:

*"I was studying at Yuh Cheng School, where my grandfather was on the board for two years. Later, my parents felt the English-educated would be better off, so I went to Tampines Primary School.*

*"My younger brother was starting his first year there and my mum just said: 'Okay, the two of you go together'. At the English school, I ended up in the same class as him even though I was two years older!"*



A village school compound in Tampines, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs



A sports day event at the former Tampines Primary School, 1960s  
Tampines Primary School Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Siow, who lived near Tampines Primary for a number of years, related the great respect that the kampong residents held for teachers:

*"If a child was naughty, you sent for his father or mother and you could be sure the child would do better. During rambutan or durian season, they would always be trying to give the teachers fruits. We couldn't accept the gifts, but the juicy rambutans were always a temptation, so we bought the fruits from them at a discounted price."*

Beyond educating the young residents of the area, Tampines Primary was also noted for its role in community service. In 1973, some 650 students from its Primary 4, 5, and 6 classes took part in a five-kilometre fund-raising walkathon that was widely reported in the press.

Accompanied by their teachers, the students managed to raise \$11,000 in total. Half of the proceeds was donated to the Tampines Home, a shelter for mentally disabled children, while the remainder was used to help poor students and to purchase sports and science equipment. According to the school's principal, K. Nagiah, the school wanted to help the less fortunate and chose Tampines Home to be its beneficiary as it was located nearby.

## A LINE IN THE SAND: THE QUARRIES OF TAMPINES

Sand quarrying in Tampines started as early as 1912, with newspaper reports noting that large quantities of Tampines sand were being used as a filtering medium at the Woodleigh waterworks. However, it was only in the 1960s as Singapore embarked on numerous public housing projects that the sand quarry industry went into overdrive. At its peak, there were more than 20 sand quarries in Tampines.

The soaring demand for sand, vital in the production of cement used for the building of Housing & Development Board (HDB) flats, transformed the landscape of Tampines and left it pockmarked with gaping pits. Wastewater runoff from the quarries polluted ponds, streams and rivers, wrecked farmland, and caused flooding. Dust clouds also became a common feature of the Tampines skyline, as travellers like journalist Tan Bah Bah noted:

*"The road linking the old 7th milestone Hougang (known as Au Kang Chit Koh) with Upper Changi Road was one of Singapore's dustiest. Tampines Road – the country-cousin predecessor to the spick-and-span Tampines Expressway – (passed) through a number of sand quarries. Motorists trying to navigate this long and winding rural road had to watch out for sand and stones falling from speeding lorries."*



A sand quarry in Tampines, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs

In 1961, a group of Tampines villagers met then Minister for National Development Tan Kia Gan, to apprise the government of the environmental damage caused by the quarries. The government applied to the High Court for an injunction to stop quarrying operations, and made some 60 sand companies institute anti-pollution measures as well as pay compensation to the farmers.

However, tensions between the quarry operators and the farmers of Tampines continued, with the Ministry of National Development noting that "many ... cases (of compensation claims were still) pending settlement" in 1963.

The economic pull of the quarrying industry remained strong well into the 1970s, and many farmers even gave up their farms to become drivers and manual labourers in the quarries. Tampines Road soon became dominated by a roaring river of sand-carrying trucks – by 1972, the amount of sand being taken out of the quarries each day filled between 1,500 and 2,000 lorry-loads.

Despite government interventions and regulations, some quarry operators continued to dump their sand washing waste into drains and waterways. In 1981, then Minister of



A sand quarry in Tampines, 1970s  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs





An aerial view of the sand quarries in Tampines, 1990  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board



A sand quarry in Tampines, 1980s  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

National Development Teh Cheang Wan summed up the result of more than two decades of quarrying:

*“Anyone flying over the Tampines area can see for himself the colossal ruin caused by unrestrained sand quarrying ... (the area) is pockmarked by excavations. The quarrying for building materials can leave behind devastation and destruction if there is no proper planning and control.”*

Pledging that “the old system of cheap mining for sand must go”, Teh announced that most quarry operations would be phased out. The government would further tighten its regulations, allowing only companies that had effective pollution controls, management expertise and equipment to continue operations.

In line with the new regulations, HDB started its own sand quarry on a 130-hectare site in Tampines in 1981. It featured a fully automated plant that minimised wastage, and pipelines to move slurry and silt to the coast for land reclamation were also installed. At the same time, HDB proceeded to take over quarries run by private operators, and, by 1981, the board owned seven sand quarries in Tampines.

By the late 1980s, the industry had become less lucrative and sand quarrying activities started to slow down. The quarry located near the southern end of Paya Lebar Airport was the last quarry to cease operations in 1991,

and part of Temasek Polytechnic was built on its site. Some former quarries were also converted into fishing ponds by entrepreneurs who charged fees to fishing enthusiasts.

Today, two former quarries remain in the area. One of the quarries has been converted into Bedok Reservoir, while another, located along Tampines Avenue 10, has remained largely untouched since the 1980s. Filled with rainwater over time, the latter is said to be 30 metres deep and is sheltered from the main roads by a thick tree-line.

### LORONG HALUS

#### Night soil days: A short history of waste disposal

Before Singapore introduced its modern sewage system, human excrement – euphemistically referred to as night soil – was collected from houses by labourers balancing bamboo poles on their shoulders and from which buckets of night soil were suspended.

Prior to 1915, night soil collection was dominated by private contractors, who sold the waste by the cartload to farmers for use as fertiliser. According to an early newspaper report, a pail of night soil could fetch eight cents. This collection system was mainly confined to the town and suburban residential areas as villagers in outlying kampongs would have directly applied the waste to their fields or buried it.

In 1915, the colonial municipality introduced a scheme of compulsory night soil collection which covered an initial 2,207 homes. For a fee



A night soil collection truck, 1980s  
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

of \$1 per month, municipal vans would collect night soil from these homes every alternate day and transport them to tanks at various sewage stations. The waste was then pumped to the sewage disposal works at Alexandra Road, where it was treated into sludge and processed into manure.

The municipality then announced an \$8 million sewerage scheme that covered the northern and eastern parts of the island in 1934 which included a sludge disposal works and a plan to discharge treated effluent into Sungei Serangoon. A granite tender was called for a “Municipal Sludge Disposal Works” in 1937 but it was only in 1941 that the plant at Lorong Halus was completed.

The sludge plant, officially named the Serangoon Sludge Treatment Works, was built next to Sungei Blukar and included digestion tanks and sludge drying beds to treat both sewage from the Alexandra works and night soil from collection centres such as those at People’s Park and Albert Street. Sludge, or solid waste left after treatment of sewage, was sold as fertiliser or used to reclaim swampland in the area.

A Sewage Treatment Works was also built at nearby Kim Chuan Road, which operated in tandem with the Sludge Treatment Works. Both plants were designated protected areas in 1950, with police authorised to shoot trespassers.



Workers at a night soil collection point, 1980s  
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



The night soil collection system was gradually phased out during the 1970s, when the Singapore government started installing modern sanitation facilities which directly connected homes to sewerage pipes. Lorong Halus was the last night soil disposal station left in Singapore when the night soil collection system was officially discontinued in January 1987.

By then, the last few areas from which night soil was still collected manually were Lorong Lew Lian, Tampines Road, Bugis Street and Lavender Street. A ceremony was held at Lorong Halus to mark the official end of the night soil system, with some 78 collectors switching to other jobs such as cleaners and refuse collectors.

The general secretary of the former Public Daily-Rated Nightsoil Employees Union, Teo Oh Huat, reflected:

*"The workers knew they had to stop working as night soil workers sooner or later. There were no protests even though many of them still liked their jobs."*

### Lorong Halus landfill

In the 1950s, there was a landfill in the Lorong Halus area where raw refuse was dumped, compacted with bulldozers and covered with earth. The landfill was enlarged in 1967 after the closure of the Kolam Ayer dumping ground. In recognition of growing land scarcity, the Singapore government installed a refuse incinerator at Ulu Pandan during the mid-1970s to ease the pressure on the landfills at Lorong Halus and Lim Chu Kang.



*The landfill at Lorong Halus, 1980s*  
Courtesy of National Environment Agency

However, as industrial production and the consumption habits of the population increased, the country's average output of daily refuse nearly doubled between 1980 and 1987. By the 1990s, the landfill had mushroomed to 234 hectares, or the size of more than 100 football fields.

While the garbage mounds, some of which reached 10 storeys high, were compacted and shrouded with earth to mitigate the smells emitting from the landfill, this method could not prevent gases such as methane from building up. Lee How Hay (b. 1955), who lived across the Sungei Serangoon, remembered:

*"We really got to smell Lorong Halus even though we weren't exactly living at the river's edge. The smouldering smell came from methane gas building up in the piles of rubbish."*

In the event when the swelling gases started fires, the landfill's pungent stench would be carried far across the island. Residents of housing estates as far away as MacPherson complained of the effect of the garbage fires on air quality, adding that they could sometimes see the smoke from the landfill even as fire engines were regularly deployed to put out fires.

Enterprising scrap dealers saw an opportunity to make a profit as lorry drivers heading to the Lorong Halus landfill would sometimes salvage scrap metal from their load to sell. These drivers usually carried waste from construction, engineering, hardware, painting and plumbing firms. To obtain good quality scrap, dealers had to hone their art of quickly and accurately grading metals, with a tonne of scrap iron going for around \$130. Some of these scrap would then be resold to corporations such as the National Iron and Steel Mills, while aluminium and copper were exported.

The first dealers here were said to be a Madam Pek and her husband, who by popular legend arrived with a beach umbrella and a weighing scale in 1979. They monopolised the pickings of the waste recycling trade for three years, but by 1985 there were eight other dealers

in the area. A number of the later arrivals were reportedly proprietors of hardware and engineering firms seeking to tide over Singapore's first economic recession in 1985.

In the following years, the scrap dealers were relocated from the area by the government as plans for the development of Tampines were carried out. With the creation of an offshore landfill at Pulau Semakau announced in 1989 and its commencement of operations a decade later, the Lorong Halus landfill ceased operations on 31 March 1999.



*The charcoal port at Lorong Halus, 1980s*  
Courtesy of Tampines GRC Community Sports Clubs

### THE CHARCOAL PORT AND THE "SUNGEI ROAD" OF TAMPINES

In the 21st century, the smoky fumes of burning charcoal are familiar to Singaporeans mainly in the context of barbecues, or perhaps the rare eatery that still prepares traditional dishes over a charcoal-fired stove.

Before the 1960s, just about every street hawker shovelled charcoal to fuel stoves used to prepare dishes like Hokkien *mee* (fried noodles) and *satay* (grilled meat skewers) as well as various stews, roasts and soups. However, the widespread adoption of electricity and gas for cooking in the later decades greatly reduced the use of and demand for charcoal.

In the past, charcoal traders would gather in various places – from Clarke Quay in the 19th century (where their trade gave the area opposite today's Liang Court shopping centre the name of Cha Joon Tau or "Firewood Port" in Hokkien) to Sungei Rochor and then to Tanjong Rhu in the late 1950s.

In 1986, the Singapore government resettled charcoal traders at Tanjong Rhu to a new charcoal port at Lorong Halus, on the east bank of the Sungei Serangoon. Sitting on reclaimed land, the 4,000-square-metre port and warehouse complex could accommodate up to 11 trading boats at a time. Most of these vessels were *tongkangs* or *perahus* from Indonesia or Thailand.

The improved facilities at Lorong Halus proved to be a boon for traders who re-exported some 100 containers of charcoal to other countries including Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong and Japan. The higher rental, in tandem with increased freight and utilities charges, however squeezed the profit margins of traders who catered only to the local market.

The presence of the charcoal port also drew traders of a different sort – *karung guni* ("rag and bone dealers" in Malay) who collected discarded furniture, household goods and appliances from HDB flats to sell to the Thai and Indonesian sailors on the charcoal boats.

These *karung guni* dealers would appear on a daily basis with lorry-loads of clothes, furniture like sofa sets, beds and tables, as well as appliances such as washing machines and fans. With Singaporeans frequently upgrading their household goods or moving into new HDB flats, the dealers often had varied pickings for sale.

Other entrepreneurs offered items such as second-hand cassette tapes of Indonesian and Thai music, radios and television sets. This led to the informal market being given the nickname, the "Sungei Road of Tampines", in reference to the famous "Thieves' Market" at Jalan Besar. Both the charcoal port and the informal market closed in the 1990s.



### Lorong Halus Wetland

In 2007, the Public Utilities Board (PUB) sought to dam Sungei Serangoon and the nearby Sungei Punggol. The dam would create two new reservoirs and expand the national water catchment coverage from half to two-thirds of the island.

Before the plan could proceed, authorities had to deal with the mounds of garbage that had accumulated over the years. This was because leachate (liquid that drains from a landfill) from the former landfill potentially contained pollutants including heavy metals that could contaminate the new reservoirs. Fortunately, PUB's tests of leachate from the Lorong Halus landfill revealed negligible amounts of pollutants such as mercury, lead and cadmium. The tests showed that most of the contaminants had over the years become inert or had been drained out to sea.

Nevertheless, to mitigate the effects of any remaining pollutants, PUB elected to turn a nine-hectare portion of the former landfill into a wetland that would help treat groundwater. Besides also serving as a sanctuary for wildlife and increasing the biodiversity of the area, the wetland would provide nearby residents with a green space for recreation, education and research.

To seal off the former landfill from the new reservoir, an 18-metre-deep wall measuring 6.4 kilometres in length was cut into the riverbank. Nearly a metre thick, this wall was made of cement mixed with bentonite (an absorbent clay) and earth. Wells and pumps were also installed to draw water and leachate out of the ground, as well as to filter out ammonia and other particles.

The filtration process, known as a bio-remediation system, involves pumping water into reed beds (shallow basins dug into the earth) which are filled with cattails, papyrus and vetivers. These plants serve as natural filters that purify the leachate by pulling out nitrogen, phosphorus and other contaminants. After this system was installed, the Lorong Halus Wetland was officially opened in 2011 as part of PUB's Active, Beautiful, Clean (ABC) Waters programme.

Even when the Lorong Halus landfill was still in operation, the area around the mouth of Sungei Serangoon had already gained a reputation for being one of the best places in Singapore for bird watching. In recent years, nearly 50 species of birds were spotted at the Lorong Halus Wetland. Some of these species include Great Egrets (*Ardea alba*), Little Herons (*Butorides striatus*, known in Malay as Pucung Bakau), White-breasted Waterhens (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Eastern Marsh Harriers (*Circus spilonotus*) and White-throated Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*).

Other species spotted here include the White-bellied Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*), known in Malay as Helang Siput; one of the largest raptors in Singapore, the Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*); as well as the Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia singaporensis*), found only in Singapore and southern Johor. The wetland is also a haven for various species of butterflies, dragonflies and moths including the Atlas Moth, one of the largest moth species in the world.



An aerial view of Lorong Halus Wetland, 2010  
Courtesy of PUB, Singapore's National Water Agency



Lorong Halus Wetland, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

## TAMPINES TOWN



The construction of Tampines Town in progress, 1982  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

Today, any mention of Tampines is likely to conjure up images of a bustling and modern Housing & Development Board (HDB) town, or the crowds that throng the shopping malls at Tampines Central which are among the most popular in Singapore.

However, just over forty years ago, the area where Tampines is presently located was still a rural landscape lined with swamps, numerous farms and large sand quarries. Even the villagers, living in their kampongs to the north and clustered around the rivers of Sungei Tampines, Sungei Api Api and Sungei Serangoon, would have regarded this area as truly *ulu* ("remote" in Malay).

In 1978, HDB divided Singapore into eight public housing zones, including a Bedok/Tampines zone on the eastern side of the island. That same year, plans for a Tampines

New Town (as satellite towns were then called) were announced and land had to be cleared to make way for it.

As a result, more than 5,000 graves in the Hock San Teng Hokkien Cemetery and Wah Suah Teng Teochew Cemetery off Jalan Tiga Ratus were exhumed, and the remains cremated and relocated to columbaria at Mount Vernon and Nee Soon. Previously known colloquially as Sa Pak Yee Kar, this former cemetery land now makes up the southern portion of Tampines Town where the well-known Round Market is located.

The town was originally slated to span 694 hectares, with a projected population of 230,000 residents living in 45,000 flats, and with space left for later developments including Tampines West and Tampines North. The initial plans for the town included



light industries, a range of communal amenities such as markets, community centres and shops, as well as road access to other parts of Singapore via the Pan-Island Expressway (PIE). Bedok Reservoir would serve as the town's "green lung", separating Tampines from Bedok Town.

A concurrent project to reclaim land off the East Coast and later at Pasir Ris also meant that there were immediate and practical reasons to flatten the hills of Tampines, and almost 72,000 tonnes of earth were moved via a 5.2-kilometre conveyor belt to a jetty in Bedok. This project, which involved both excavation and reclamation, was carried out by two Japanese companies – Ohbayashi Gumi and Rinkai. Overall, it was estimated that 45 million cubic metres of earth was removed from Tampines, an amount enough to fill 80,000 HDB flats.



The Tampines construction site, where ground works were being carried out in preparation for the construction of Tampines Town, 1980  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board



A conveyor belt transporting earth from Tampines to the eastern coast for reclamation, 1980  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

## DESIGNING SINGAPORE'S FIRST PRECINCT TOWN

By the time plans for Tampines Town were on the drawing board, HDB had already planned and built several satellite towns, including Toa Payoh (1965) and Ang Mo Kio (1973). The pressing issue of Singapore's housing crisis had been addressed, and thousands of Singaporeans formerly living in overcrowded dwellings and rural kampongs were largely resettled in new public housing flats.

When it was formed in 1960, HDB's main ambit was to address the pressing issue of housing shortages. As such, the board's focus during its early years was mainly on the provision of mass and affordable public housing. Prioritising mass production over design, many early HDB towns had been composed of identikit slabs of housing blocks. As HDB's chief architect and CEO at the time, Liu Thai Ker, described:

*"(In the initial years) there was a very clear sense of purpose that we built for shelter, we don't build for good architecture. As a country just starting out, that I agree was the correct priority."*

By 1979 however, HDB declared that the era of speed-focused mass production was over. Having made substantial headway in meeting housing demand, it could now devote more attention to creating and shaping the individual design identities of each town, and even neighbourhoods within each town could also be differentiated through architectural features, motifs and building materials.

A town planning standard known as the New Town Structural Model was conceptualised to guide the allocation of residential, commercial, and open spaces within HDB neighbourhoods. According to this model, each new town would be organised into three tiers.

At its core was the precinct, the basic unit of planning comprising four to eight blocks of flats framed around public spaces and playgrounds. Six to seven precincts would in turn make up a neighbourhood, and four to five

neighbourhoods would then be organised into a town. The concept brought amenities and facilities such as shops, parks and public spaces within easier reach of residents, and provided social spaces within each neighbourhood to foster greater communal bonding.

It was here in Tampines that HDB first pioneered the use of the precinct model, along with other progressive town planning principles such as integrating transport and land use. Explaining the thinking behind precincts, Liu said in an oral history interview:

*"I (had) helped HDB to crystallise (the concept of neighbourhoods in the 1970s) ... After many years, I realised that the neighbourhood ... (was) too abstract for both architects and residents to understand. Because a resident can only relate to a smaller territorial area and not a neighbourhood – it's far too big."*

*"And therefore (precincts) were created precisely to help the architects to deal with a piece of land for site planning, which is large enough for it to be efficient but small enough for architects to be able to design with individual characteristics and variations. The size of a precinct (is) about the right size for people to organise the residents' committee, which now becomes quite an important element in the hierarchy of (town management)."*



The low-rise Tampines Round Market and its high-rise surrounds, 1980s  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board



Projecting corner rooms of a HDB block in Tampines, 1992  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

See Boon Ping (b. 1985), who has lived in Tampines since 1986, concurred:

*"I do think precincts make a difference in everyday life ... My block is a precinct centre where dry markets, coffee shops and playgrounds are located, and it's a focal point and a gathering space for neighbours to meet and have a chat."*

With the use of the precinct as the basic unit of planning, the homogeneous skyline of high-rise flats that was common in older towns would be a thing of the past. Instead, blocks of varying heights were constructed in Tampines, and these were juxtaposed with public spaces and low-rise buildings such as schools and community centres to create a checkerboard effect.





*Diamond-shaped motifs resembling Malay woven mats in the void deck of a block in Tampines, 1987*  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

With more scope for flexibility and creativity, planners also sought to give Tampines a unique “personality” reflective of its rich local history. Among the sources of inspiration for HDB designers were indigenous cultures that embodied a Southeast Asian identity. In Tampines, this is reflected in colour-contrast brick walls, which were arranged as diamond-shaped motifs to resemble Malay woven mats.

Other aspects of the town’s design also reveal how the uniform concrete slabs of earlier HDB flats had given way to more imaginative architecture by the 1980s. Staggered, curved

and angled block designs are common across the town, as are features such as pitched roofs, round balconies, trellises, roof-top gardens and corner rooms projecting outwards from the blocks. One can also find arches instead of the utilitarian square corners of void deck access ways. While these designs may seem to be a mainstay of most HDB towns today, it was here in Tampines that many such features were first pioneered.

For the planners in HDB, such innovations were a reflection of the changing lifestyles of Singaporeans. A generation that had grown up in kampong houses with attap roofs and few amenities had become accustomed to more modern, sophisticated living environments, and HDB responded with “socially-led urban planning” in order to meet the changing needs and wants of residents.

Hence, in Tampines, HDB provided flats with ceramic floor tiles, aluminium sliding doors and tinted glass windows. They also began interlacing precincts and neighbourhoods with green spaces that extended throughout the town (more details about green spaces in

Tampines can be found on p. 59). These green spaces paved the way for the introduction of more biodiversity-rich areas within HDB towns, such as Tampines Eco Green.

HDB also considered how the built environment could play a role in community development. Each precinct contained flats of different sizes to encourage interaction between residents from different races and socio-economic backgrounds. Town councillors were also sent for social awareness courses, and the board facilitated the establishment of Residents’ Committees.

Many of these efforts sought to foster the spirit of *gotong royong* (“communal cooperation” in Malay), which had been an integral part of kampong life in Tampines before its transformation into a high-rise HDB town. HDB’s then CEO Liu Thai Ker described the evolution of the board’s philosophy:

*“We (HDB) started off by providing shelter. Then we provided good housing, then we provided (a) good environment. Then we wanted to create a good community, so the sociological research*



*Green spaces within precincts in Tampines, 1984*  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board



*Angled block designs in a precinct in Tampines, 1990*  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board



*The earliest blocks of flats built in Tampines at Tampines Avenue 2, 2017*  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



came in. We helped the government to organise the block representatives, a kind of precinct committee. So we're not just giving physical environment, we are creating community."

Eventually, a 1986 survey showed that HDB's efforts at creating stronger communal bonds was paying off. A study of 158 residents across three neighbourhoods – two in Tampines and one in Jurong which was not built on the precinct concept – revealed that Tampines residents recognised more of their neighbours, perceived a higher level of friendliness among them and felt a stronger sense of responsibility towards public property.

### THE WOMAN WHO DESIGNED TAMPINES

A little known fact about Tampines is that much of it was the work of HDB's senior architect, Boey Yut Mei. Boey spent 11 years from 1978 leading the HDB team that designed Tampines Town. According to her, more than 20 designs were submitted before the final plans were approved by then HDB CEO Liu Thai Ker.

In an interview with *The Straits Times* in 1992, Boey related that she had envisioned an estate where children would grow up saying: "I was a Tampines boy or girl." It was with this in mind that she and her team incorporated elements like green pathways and community areas into each precinct, an idea that eventually found its way into other HDB towns across Singapore.

In a later appointment as head of HDB's Landscape Studio, Boey was also involved in the project to reintroduce Tempinis trees in the town. In 1996, she recalled the inspiration for such a move: "Changi is named after the Changi tree and Kranji is named after the Kranji tree. But I realised there were no Tempinis trees in Tampines New Town!"

Besides Tampines, Boey also planned today's Pasir Ris Town, particularly the waterway around Sungei Api Api as well as Punggol Waterway.

### THE 1980S: THE EARLY DAYS OF A NEW TOWN

For some of the new residents of Tampines in the 1980s, moving to the new town meant a transition from rural village life to high-rise living. See Boon Ping, whose family moved into a Tampines flat in 1986 from a kampong at the 9th milestone, had this to say:

*"There were conflicting feelings – my extended family (who resided at Tampines Road for four generations) were happy that they were moving into a HDB flat within Tampines Town, but at the same time worried that they might not get used to the life. From living on the ground floor (in the kampong), they were moving several storeys up. At a height, they found difficulties trying to put their laundry out to dry, and they found it weird that they had to lock their doors, which they didn't do in the kampong."*

Many early residents of Tampines Town recalled that the estate in its early years did not offer many amenities such as transport, education, shopping and recreation, which are commonplace today. Instead, they speak of the town as an altogether quieter place. Anwar Bin Haji Mawardee (b. 1951), who has lived in Tampines for over 30 years, shared:

*"We moved to Tampines in 1985, and at the time there weren't as many flats (as there are today), it wasn't as crowded as it is now. Transport was a bit of a problem – there wasn't a bus interchange, just a temporary place that served as an interchange. When we met our friends from other parts of the island, they would say: 'Wah you live in Tampines, you ulu type ah.' We also thought there weren't many facilities in the early days ... but we chose Tampines because we wanted to be close to our family."*

This perception of Tampines as being *ulu* during its early years as a HDB town is echoed by Clarice Teoh (b. 1957):

*"I think Tampines in those days was considered really ulu, if you didn't have any business there or had to visit anybody there, (few people) would venture out to Tampines. When we selected a flat here, we were a bit hesitant. It was almost like an*

*'end of the earth' feeling. Bedok was popular, and it was already built up, and most people didn't think beyond Bedok (in the east)."*

As a result of their relocation to new high-rise flats, many former kampong residents had to leave behind their livestock and fruit trees. Nonetheless, they continued to maintain elements of community spirit, which gradually adapted itself to life in the HDB flats, as described by Tampines resident Anwar:

*"When we first moved to Tampines, our neighbour, a Chinese family, was also from a kampong. So it was good that we still had that 'kampong-hood' feeling. During Chinese New Year, they would give my children ang paos ("red packets" in Hokkien), and during Hari Raya we would give their children the same. We still had that kind of kampong culture."*

While some of the kampong spirit remained intact, the move from kampongs to modern urban housing still brought changes to Singapore's social fabric, driven not only by transformed living environments, but also by economic development, evolving lifestyles and rising affluence.



Tampines Town, 1983  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

Where close-knit relations with neighbours and extended family were common and often necessary in kampong life, observers like Dr Aline Wong, then a Member of Parliament for Tampines GRC, noted a loosening of these ties from the 1980s:

*"Modern Singaporeans do not feel the need to belong. They are very self-contained within their families. The loss of the old kampong spirit is inevitable. We can try to know each other, but we can't duplicate what used to be. The young people are more active during the day and they already have their own circle of friends outside the home."*

The trend of reduced interaction with neighbours was captured in a quote in *The Straits Times* from Daniel Tan, who lived in a Tampines flat in the 1990s:

*"We don't say hello to others apart from our immediate neighbours. I lived in a rented two-room in MacPherson (previously), and it was so different. You can borrow sugar, tumpang ('leave' in Malay) your children and your key (with the neighbours), no problem. But now, unless I really have to, I don't bother them."*





Tampines Bus Interchange, 1990s  
Courtesy of William Oh

Nevertheless, community ties have continued to evolve in later years, with residents settling into urban living and new generations beginning to redefine the ways they connect with fellow residents. As Tampines resident Sarina Binte Anwar (b. 1983) shared:

*“There is a sense of community here, but I’m not sure to what extent it resembles the kampong spirit during Tampines’ early days, because there is no way to return [to the past]. The younger generation is developing their own community and their own spirit. I do see some interest groups forming here. For example, my younger brother is very involved in the community and tries to get the older residents to exercise.”*

Shared amenities are also helping to bring HDB residents together. At Block 441 in Tampines Street 43, the Tampines North Citizens’ Consultative Committee maintains and stocks two refrigerators with fish, meat, eggs, vegetables and fruits contributed by residents,

for the common use of all. The two fridges in the lift lobby of the block evoke the sharing culture of the kampongs, as does a community garden at Block 839 initiated by resident Chew Wei. Unlike formally established gardens, this community garden is unfenced, with its open nature making it an inviting place for residents to gather. A nearby void deck cafe run by residents serves free food and has become a thriving social space.

Where village provision shops and common areas were once places for kampong residents to gather and socialise, new residents of Tampines in the 1980s would usually meet at the Tampines Round Market & Food Centre, located at Tampines Street 11 or at other similar neighbourhood centres. At these centres, they could find laundromats, post offices, photo studios and even Japanese convenience stores, which were then a novelty.



The community garden at Block 839, Tampines Street 83, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



The community café at Block 839, Tampines Street 83, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

See Boon Ping, who was born in a Tampines kampong and has lived in Tampines ever since, recalled:

*“Before the malls came up in the early 1990s, Tampines Central was empty. Most of the activities were at the Round Market area, Neighbourhood 2 Centre (near Block 201) and Neighbourhood 8 Centre.*

*“People would buy groceries from the Round Market, which many called Da Pa Sah (‘big market’ in Mandarin). Residents would also frequent the Block 201 area to see the family doctor at the clinic, shop at the Da Ji supermarket or buy clothes from the shops. For more comprehensive shopping, Tampines residents would need to go to Bedok Town Centre.*

*“The Town Centre near Block 501 was a traditional HDB town centre but it was a lot smaller than the town centre of Bedok, Ang Mo Kio and Clementi. When it first opened, it had the first air-conditioned food court in Tampines, so it was very crowded – you couldn’t find a seat. The Town Centre also housed Tampines Regional Library, Prime Supermarket, Popular Bookstore, a few coffeeshops and a very small market. It complemented the bus interchange across the road.”*

Simple as they were, these neighbourhood centres, markets and eateries hold fond memories for many residents as they also served as meeting points for family and friends

to congregate. Jason Vinod Peter (b. 1981), a former resident of Tampines recalled:

*“The Round Market was a short walk away from my house, providing us with a wide array of amenities. It was my morning weekend breakfast hangout with my cousin. We used to sit for hours stirring our kopi-o (sweetened coffee without milk), mingling with the many familiar faces we saw all the time.”*

Having grown up in Tampines, Wong Yong Jie (b. 1990), reminisced about making new friends at his neighbourhood playground:

*“Before the proliferation of the internet, many afternoons were spent at the fitness corner and playgrounds, or kicking a ball at the void decks in the neighbourhood. The school holidays always meant a surge in these activities, along with many more friendships forged. One memory of the earlier years that stood out for me was the yearly gathering during the Mid-Autumn Festival. Kids of all ages would gather at the fitness corner with their parents in tow. The lanterns and sparklers, as well as the laughter and chatter, would light up the heart of the neighbourhood.”*

#### THE 1990S: SINGAPORE’S FIRST REGIONAL CENTRE

By the year 1990, the population of Tampines Town had risen to 176,800. This was due in part to the town’s growing connectivity and accessibility, which was further augmented by the opening of Tampines MRT station on 16 December 1989.



A food and fun fair at Tampines, 1990s  
Courtesy of William Oh





A model showcasing plans for the Regional Centre in Tampines, 1990s  
Courtesy of William Oh

Yet this milestone event was but a precursor to the writing of a fresh new page in the history of Tampines: its development as Singapore's first Regional Centre. First announced in the Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) 1991 Concept Plan, the idea to create Regional Centres in Singapore's suburbs was part of a long-term effort by the government to decentralise commercial activity from the downtown business area.

According to the 1991 Concept Plan, Tampines would be the pioneer town for this strategy, with the aim of transforming it into a "mini-city" – a commercial hub 15 times the size of a normal HDB town centre that would contain offices, homes and recreational facilities.

Major corporations began to establish operations in Tampines. In 1993, the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS) opened its \$98 million Tampines Centre – an eight-storey office and retail complex housing key functions such as audit, training and auto-banking.

Tampines Centre had as its anchor tenant the Osaka-based Japanese retailer Sogo, which operated a supermarket in the basement of the building and a department store on the first and second floors. With a total floor area of 5400 square metres, Sogo's Tampines outlet was its second in Singapore after its flagship store in Raffles City. Another notable tenant in the centre was Fairwood Fast Food, an eatery from Hong Kong that sold baked pork rice and herbal soup among other dishes.

Situated next to Tampines Centre and operated by Cathay Organisation, the Pavilion Cineplex was the first cinema complex in Tampines Town. It boasted four cinemas, and was Singapore's first cinema complex fully accessible to the disabled. In fact, the centre and cineplex were so popular when they first opened that newspapers noted customers travelling down from as far as Bukit Batok, Yishun and Jurong.

For many, the area quickly became the place to hang out as shared by a former Tampines resident Bryne Leong (b. 1985):

*"(I remember going to) Pavilion and watching Disney movies and Titanic. There was a Burger King downstairs where an older schoolmate and I would split cash to share a meal and fight over French fries."*

The malls also provided new job opportunities for Tampines residents such as Jana Hussain (b. 1977) who shared her experience working at Sogo:



Pavilion Cineplex, 1990s  
Courtesy of Urban Redevelopment Authority



The former DBS Tampines Centre, which housed Japanese retailer Sogo, 1990s  
Courtesy of Urban Redevelopment Authority

*"My childhood and teenage life revolved around Tampines. We always sat at McDonald's and Swensen's, or we would lepak ('relax' in Malay) at Pavilion. My first job was at Sogo's gift wrap counter when I was waiting for my GCE N Level results. It was super busy during Christmas season. Our counter was inside the mall but the management later moved us outside as there was limited space in the basement. The job was tiring but fulfilling because we got to make new friends and experience working life at the same time."*



Tampines Mall, 1990s  
Courtesy of William Oh

By 1996, Tampines Central was fast becoming known as a retail hub. In that year, another shopping complex, Tampines Mall, was opened by the former Minister for Communications and Member of Parliament for Tampines GRC, Mah Bow Tan. The mall complemented its neighbour, Century Square, which started business the year before. See Boon Ping recalled that the appearance of more retail options generated excitement amongst the residents of Tampines:

*"In 1995, Century Square opened and that created an even bigger stir, because Sogo was just one departmental store. Century Square was huge, it had a K-Mart and later the Metro departmental store. It felt like shops from the Orchard Road area were being brought to Tampines for the first time."*

The increased commercial activities and facilities boosted the popularity of homes in the town. In 1993, *The Straits Times* named Tampines "the HDB estate everyone wants",

with reference to flat buyers' preference for Tampines over other satellite towns like such as Woodlands and Choa Chu Kang. At one point, there were 37 applications for every new four-room flat in Tampines.

In 1998, Sogo closed its Tampines outlet, and the DBS Tampines Centre and Pavilion Cineplex were both put up for collective sale in 2006. However, new shopping malls such as Tampines 1 were built in its place.

Other commercial establishments that have chosen to base their operations in Tampines include OCBC Bank and United Overseas Bank, both of which have concentrated their back-office operations here. The Tampines Industrial Park also provided a launchpad for companies including environmental solutions success story Hyflux.

Beyond commercial developments, Tampines continued to lead the way in building a Regional Centre that promotes sustainable and eco-friendly living. In 2013, it became the first town to have a completed 11.3 km cycling path network under Singapore's National Cycling Plan. As Singapore's pioneer cycling town, off-road cycling paths have been designated, and bicycle racks and rental kiosks are easily available. Volunteer cycling wardens also patrol the streets to offer advice on safe cycling. Like many other initiatives first piloted in Tampines, the concept of dedicated paths for cyclists has since been replicated across various towns in Singapore.



Then Minister for Communications and Environment Mah Bow Tan touring the DBS Tampines Centre and Sogo during its opening, 1993  
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



## A WORLD HABITAT AWARD TOWN

A decade after the first residents of Tampines Town moved into their flats, HDB's work on the town was recognised with the 1991 World Habitat Award from the Building and Social Housing Foundation, ahead of the competing cities of Vancouver in Canada and Boston in the United States. The World Habitat Awards are given out annually and are run in partnership with UN-Habitat.

Announced in October 1992, the award held Tampines Town as an exemplar of "high-quality, high-density and affordable housing". Globally, Tampines was also a "timely lesson to a rapidly urbanising world on excellence, economy and efficiency in the provision of high-rise housing, as well as on how to retain socially cohesive communities."

Singapore's submission for the World Habitat Award in 1991 had initially been in the Developing World category, but the judges deemed Tampines worthy of being assessed in the Developed Country section. According to HDB, Tampines was selected above Singapore's other satellite towns as it best represented the country's achievements in public housing. Tony Tan Keng Joo, the board's chief architect at that time, commented:

*"We chose Tampines because it represents a typical comprehensive new town development. It does not represent the early or the latest new town. Tampines is a culmination of refinements and improvements to the new town model."*

To commemorate the achievement, a three-metre-tall sculpture in the shape of the World Habitat Award trophy was installed in front of Block 510, Tampines Central 1. It was later shifted to the cul-de-sac at Tampines Avenue 5, located just behind Our Tampines Hub in 2017.



*The World Habitat Award commemorative sculpture, 2017*  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



*Then HDB Chairman Hsuan Owyang received the World Habitat Award for Tampines Town at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, 1992*  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

# COMMUNITY SPACES AND INSTITUTIONS

Community spaces, such as places of worship, green spaces and markets, are key to the heritage and culture of a town. The following community spaces have brought people together, kept traditions alive and helped define the identity of Tampines.

## MASJID DARUL GHUFRAN

503 Tampines Ave 5

Completed in December 1990, Masjid Darul Ghufuran is a focal point for the Muslim community in Tampines. Originally built with a brown brick facade, the mosque was later re-clad in the azure blue that made it such a distinctive landmark of the town. The mosque's blue exterior also gave rise to its colloquial name of *Menara Biru*, or "Blue Minaret" in Malay.

Before the 1980s, there were multiple *surau* ("prayer houses" in Malay) serving Muslim villagers living in the east. After receiving financial compensation from the government's acquisition of their land for public housing and other developments, many *surau* including those from Kampong Darat Nanas, Kaki Bukit, Seri Kembangan, Kampong Soo Poo and Padang Terbakar Timur contributed funds towards the construction of Darul Ghufuran.

Beyond these contributions, the \$6.2 million cost of constructing Darul Ghufuran was funded through the national Mosque Building and Mendaki Fund. In addition, various community fundraising events were also organised in the mid-1980s and they included activities such as football tournaments and food sales.

Designed by HDB, Darul Ghufuran's architecture was described as an "interplay on walls", flowing seamlessly from the surrounding

swimming pool and sports complex on Tampines Avenue 5. The varying heights of the building and brick-clad wall panels topped with white concrete layers reinforced the angled linearity of the building's overall design. The interior featured a stepped ceiling that created a geometric confluence, while the 18-metre-wide prayer hall with 60-metre-long concrete beams offered a cavernous space free of intermediate supports.

Following a series of public consultations, HDB further refined the mosque's design and added a dome to the 10-storey-high minaret, while its windows and entrances were redesigned to feature interlacing geometric patterns so familiar in Islamic design.



*Breakfast during Ramadan at the foyer, 2001*  
Courtesy of Masjid Darul Ghufuran



*Masjid Darul Ghufuran, 1994*  
Courtesy of Masjid Darul Ghufuran





The mosque's distinctive azure blue façade which was installed in the late 1990s, 2007  
Courtesy of Masjid Darul Ghufuran

In April 1988, Singapore's then Mufti Syed Isa Semait led a ceremony to determine the *qibla*, or the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, towards which Muslims face during prayers. The *qibla* was then indicated in the *mihrab* or niche in the mosque.

The three-storey mosque was formally opened on 7 December 1990, with prayer halls that could accommodate 3,500 worshippers, classrooms, a library, offices and multi-purpose halls. Despite being Singapore's second-largest mosque at the time of its completion, Darul Ghufuran was often filled to capacity especially during prayer times. By 2012, the mosque regularly drew some 5,000 congregants.

Beyond its religious role, Darul Ghufuran has acted as a beacon for inclusiveness and multiculturalism across communities. The mosque regularly holds events and activities to encourage interaction between Muslims and those of other religions and communities,

including Chinese New Year lunches for the disadvantaged and outdoor activities that involve non-Muslims.

After undergoing renovation works between 1998 and 1999 (when the blue facade was installed), Darul Ghufuran underwent another round of upgrading works from September 2016 to increase its capacity. The expanded mosque will be able to accommodate more than 5,500 worshippers when it reopens in late 2018.

#### TEMPLE CLUSTER AT TAMPINES LINK

This cluster of religious institutions includes temples previously located in Tampines during the kampong era (1800s-1980s) as well as temples from other parts of Singapore. They include Taoist and Buddhist temples, and the Jiutiaoqiao Xinba Nadutan Temple (九条桥新芭拿督坛) which is notable for housing shrines of multiple faiths and drawing worshippers from across various cultures.



Members of the Kew Sian King Temple, 1930s  
Courtesy of Kew Sian King Temple



Jiutiaoqiao Xinba Nadutan Temple, which houses shrines of multiple faiths, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

The Jiutiaoqiao Temple is a constituent of the Nadutan Baoangong Tiandegong Temple (拿督坛保安宫天德宫; 95 Tampines Link), along with the Poh Ann Keng Temple (保安宫) and the Tian Teck Keng Temple (天德宫). Founded in 1927 in Ang Mo Kio before moving to Tampines in 2004, Jiutiaoqiao enshrines the Taoist Tua Pek Kong, the Hindu god Ganesha and the uniquely Malayan deity Datuk Gong. The Tian Teck Keng Temple is known for being the only temple in Singapore to depict the deity Nezha in his battle form of three heads and six arms.



The temple cluster at Tampines Link, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

The Kew Sian King Temple (九仙宫; 7 Tampines Avenue) traces its origins to the old Tampines Road and was built near Teck Hock Village at the 7<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> milestone in 1928. A stone tablet in the temple recounts aspects of its history, including its founding by members of the Peh clan from Fujian province in China. This temple enshrines the female deity Jiutian Xuannu, as well as other deities including Guanyin and Tua Pek Kong. During the kampong period, the temple was known colloquially as Hin Nim Ma Keng, in reference to the deity Jiutian Xuannu's Hokkien name.

Other temples in the cluster include the Hia Tien Keng Leng Poh Tian which is dedicated to Guan Di, the God of War.

At the end of the temple cluster and along Tampines Avenue lies a row of shophouses that was once part of the former Hun Yeang Village. The village was named after 20th century plantation owner Khoo Hun Yeang. The shophouses, along with Hun Yeang Road and Jalan Sam Kongs Road, are among the few physical reminders left of rural Tampines before the area underwent redevelopment during the late 1970s.



Kew Sian King Temple, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



## TAMPINES CHINESE TEMPLE

25 Tampines Street 21

Opened in 1992, the Tampines Chinese Temple (淡滨尼联合宫) brings together 12 Taoist temples that once stood in Tampines before it was developed, including some that have been based here since the 19th century.

The individual temples were informed in the early 1980s that they would have to relocate to another site to make way for the development of Tampines Town. Early attempts at grouping the temples together did not take off as some of the temples were wary of a loss of individual identity and management control. Moreover, only a select few temples had the resources to relocate and construct new temples elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the Tampines Chinese Temple organising committee was eventually formed in 1985, with help from the government's resettlement officers. The committee's chairman Chua Kim Soon recalled:

*"Those temples meant a lot to residents. Many were reluctant to see them removed. So we decided to try to keep them by inviting them to*

*join the combined Tampines Chinese Temple. By themselves, most of these temple owners would not be able to afford to build new temples."*

The funds for the construction of the new temple were raised through donations from philanthropists and the community, auctions of blessed objects, and dinners celebrating occasions of religious significance. After nearly a decade of negotiations, fundraising, land acquisition and construction, the temple was officially declared open in December 1992 by former Minister for Communications Mah Bow Tan, who was also a Member of Parliament for Tampines GRC at that time.

One of the interesting features of the Tampines Chinese Temple is a 270-metre-long dragon sculpture that adorns the temple's perimeter. Within the temple are nine altars enshrining deities of its constituent temples.

### Soon Hin Ancient Temple (顺兴古庙)

Formed in the 19th century, this temple enshrines a deity of local origin, Hong Xian Da Di. The deity and the temple's origins lie in the



Tampines Chinese Temple, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

period when rural Singapore was still mainly plantations and tigers were a clear and present threat to the kampong residents of Tampines.

Hong Xian Da Di was believed by worshippers to be a man who could communicate with and restrain tigers, having been sighted in the Tampines area riding a three-legged tiger. The worship of this deity has since spread to Johor in Malaysia.

The temple is one of the oldest in Tampines, and includes a plaque dating from 1851 indicating that it was already in existence by that date. As was the case with most other temples in rural Singapore, Soon Hin Temple had its origins in an attap hut before it was rebuilt in brick in 1924.



An 1851 plaque belonging to Soon Hin Ancient Temple, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

### Kiat Sing Teng Temple (吉星亭)

This temple dates back to 1918. According to varying accounts of its origin, an immigrant, either from Thailand or Myanmar, transported three statues of Guan Yin from his homeland to the Paya Lebar area. The statues were installed in a village temple at Jalan Ang Teng, before moving to the Tampines Chinese Temple in 1992. In the temple, Guan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, is worshipped as a paragon of compassion and benevolence.

### Foo Ang Tien Temple (福安殿)

Established in the late 1940s at the 11½ milestone of Tampines Road, Foo Ang Tien is dedicated to Xing Fu Da Ren, Zhu Fu Da Ren and Li Fu Da Ren. These three deities are also

collectively known as Lords Zhu, Xing and Li. This temple, which began as an altar to the Lords, was said to have been built after a village plagued by leprosy was cured of the disease.

### Tua Pek Kong temples (comprising the Tampines 9th milestone, Loyang, Hun Yeang, Kampong Teban and Jalan Simpah temples)

The names of these five temples reflect their origins in the former kampongs of Tampines. The Tampines, Loyang and Jalan Simpah temples were built in the 1960s and 1970s after frequent accidents occurred along the narrow and winding Tampines Road, as the deity Tua Pek Kong is believed to watch over travellers.

### Tian Gong Temple in Loyang (天公坛)

This temple was previously located in Loyang, past the 12th milestone of Tampines Road, and is dedicated to the Jade Emperor (Tian Gong). During the celebration to mark the Jade Emperor's birthday, devotees at this temple are known to offer prayers for national prosperity and peace.

### Toh Tew Kang Temple (后池厅)

Established at the 8th milestone of Tampines Road in 1947, this temple was founded by the Ong clan from Jin An village in Fujian, China. It enshrines Qing Shui Zu Shi (Reverend Qing Shui), who is believed to possess curative powers.

### Tsi Ling Kong Temple (慈灵宫)

This temple was founded at the 9th milestone of Tampines Road (near Hun Yeang Village) and dedicated to Zhang Gong Sheng Jun. This deity is revered for his powers of prophecy.

### Ji Yang Tang Temple (济阳堂)

Established in 1920 at Havelock Road, Ji Yang Tang moved several times before becoming a constituent temple of the Tampines Chinese Temple. It enshrines Cai Fu Wang Ye, a deity who has his origins in Dadeng town in Fujian, China and was brought over to Singapore when a villager migrated here in 1920.



## CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY

20 Tampines Street 11

Officially opened on 30 October 1990, the Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity serves the Roman Catholic residents of Tampines and its surrounding areas in the east. For nearly two decades until the opening of the Church of Divine Mercy in Pasir Ris in 2009, Holy Trinity was at the heart of religious life for the largest Catholic parish in Singapore, estimated at more than 14,000 congregants in 2009.

Conceptualised by its first parish priest Father Paul Tay, the plans for the church underwent several changes in order to meet various building regulations. These changes included a reduction of the church's height from more than 60 metres to 22 metres as well as the inclusion of a canteen and a columbarium.

The final design of the church building resembled the form of a fish, which represents Jesus Christ in Christian iconography and was used as a symbol by early Christians to identify their religious brethren. The interior

of the church features Italian architectural designs, including stained glass panels imported from Milan, Italy.

When it first opened, Holy Trinity was known for its unusual interior design, which included a waterfall, rocks and shrubbery representing the biblical Garden of Gethsemane and Garden of Eden, as well as a stream of water that flowed along the aisles. Most of these features were however removed in later years to make space for a growing congregation.



*The church's stained glass panels which are imported from Milan, Italy, 2017*  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



*Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity, 2017*  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

## TAMPINES CENTRAL PARK

Tampines Street 82

To most Singaporeans, the concept of a garden city is a familiar one, and it is easy to assume that things were always this way. Yet, the story of how green spaces came to be an integral part of Singapore's landscape was a process of continuous experimentation and change. The design of Tampines Town in the 1980s was a key milestone in this process, as many green innovations were first pioneered here.

Although town parks were included in the satellite towns designed by HDB in the 1960s and 1970s, they were not a conscious part of urban planning. As Dr Kiat Tan, the former CEO of the National Parks Board (NParks) put it: "In the early days, land was allocated to parks because it was not economically useful. Parks tended to be far away from where people lived – patches of land that would not get in the way of later development."

However, HDB took a different approach for Tampines Town, and among the town planning innovations tried out in Tampines were green connectors for pedestrians and cyclists. These connectors created pockets of green spaces throughout the town and brought nature closer to the homes of residents.

The town planning model adopted by HDB in the 1980s contained a hierarchy of green spaces within each town, identifying parks and gardens of different scales and uses as well as creating an individual identity for each park through specific amenities and landscaping. Elements of the kampong environment, such as the fruit trees of Tampines, were also featured in the landscape of the new town, and geographical features like undulating terrain and mangroves were incorporated into the town's layout.

Tampines Central Park is one of the numerous green spaces in the town, and a fine example of how parks can combine recreational, social and cultural uses. Among the most well-loved landmarks here are the multi-coloured, mosaic-tiled watermelon and mangosteen playgrounds, both of which are part of



*Mangosteen playground, 2017*  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



*Watermelon Playground, 2017*  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



the second generation of HDB-designed playgrounds that appeared in the 1980s. One of the playgrounds is built in the shape of watermelon slices, and the other is designed as two larger-than-life mangosteens, hollowed out with doors and windows.

HDB architect Lee-Loy Kwee Wah, who designed the watermelon and mangosteen playgrounds, recalled:

*"I thought of durian but it has too many thorns and might not be very safe. After doodling for a few weeks, I came up with a giant watermelon slice sinking into the sand (this has since been replaced with rubber mats). It is a common fruit that children can relate to. The same went for mangosteens. We wanted children to be excited to use them. They had to look good but also be functional."*

Lee-Loy also designed a pineapple-themed playground in Tampines, which has since been demolished. Other themes that HDB designers toyed with for playgrounds in the late 1980s include various fruits and vegetables, snails and ladybugs as well as household objects like clocks and telephones.

Tampines Central Park also houses the

evocative bronze Mother and Child sculpture by pioneer Singapore artist Ng Eng Teng. Across a long and productive career, Ng worked with various mediums including



*Ng Eng Teng's Mother and Child sculpture, 2017*  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



*Tampines Central Park, 2004*  
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

painting and pottery. He is, however, best known for his public art sculptures that explore human relationships and meditate on the human condition.



*The former pineapple playground, 1993*  
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Today, Tampines Central Park remains a green social space where community, food and music events are hosted, including a notable concert by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra in 2002.

### **TAMPINES ROUND MARKET & FOOD CENTRE**

137 Tampines Street 11

One of the most recognisable landmarks in Tampines, the Tampines Round Market & Food Centre and its adjacent shophouses have served as a social and commercial hub for Tampines residents since its opening in 1983.

In the early 1980s, HDB envisioned the phasing out of traditional wet markets in response to changing lifestyles and the growing popularity of supermarkets. Hence, the Round Market was expected to be one of the last few wet markets to be built. However, wet markets continued to be popular with residents and HDB reintroduced them in the late 2000s.



*Tampines Round Market & Food Centre, 2017*  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board





Patrons at the Tampines Round Market & Food Centre, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

The market is surrounded by a ring of shophouses occupied by businesses such as clinics, bicycle shops, bakeries and hair salons, comprising a mix of amenities and services commonly found in neighbourhood centres. While the market's hawkers draw customers from all over the island with the quality of their food, nearby banks and shops made this area a bustling hive of activity, especially before the massive shopping malls in Tampines Central were developed. Loh Wai Poon (b. 1954), a resident of Tampines, shared:

*"I moved into Tampines Town in 1988. The Round Market was the centre of shopping at that time. Everyone in Tampines shopped there, it was a pasar ('market' in Malay) that we visited day and night for our needs. There was no day off at the market. If there was, the whole town would be upset. Those were the days."*

There is also a strong sense of camaraderie amongst the hawkers at the market - some of whom have been operating their stalls for more than three decades. Part of this rapport springs from the fact that 72 stallholders

relocated to Tampines as a group in 1983, after the market and hawker centre at Block 176 in Toa Payoh Lorong 2 was demolished to make way for a MRT line.



A fishmonger at the Tampines Round Market, 1990  
Courtesy of Housing and Development Board

Over the years, the Round Market has also hosted a number of activities not usually associated with hawker centres. These activities included classical music performances, art exhibitions and community-centric flea markets. In 2008, the market was the venue for the Singapore Art Festival's Arts Where We Eat initiative, which brought artists and musicians to hawker centres in the heartlands. New offerings and services such as wireless hot spots have also been introduced to keep up with the times.



The wet market at Tampines Round Market, 1987  
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

### HAWKERS OF TAMPINES ROUND MARKET & FOOD CENTRE

Low Kuay Chye (b. 1963), who has operated a stall at the market for more than 30 years, shared his experience as a hawker over the years:

*"I started business here in 1983 after my mother's hawker stall was relocated from Toa Payoh. We were offered two places: Lorong Ah Soo and Tampines. I had never been to Tampines, and so when I first tried to find this market, I went searching in the old Tampines Road area until my friend told me it's near the [Bedok] reservoir! The market was already built, and it was big and clean.*

*"When we first started, business was very poor. I wasn't selling fish soup as I do now. I was selling peanut cakes. There were very few customers because not all the HDB flats were completed, so the market was very quiet. We only sold \$20 worth of peanut cakes every day and the money was just [enough] to survive! It was really different compared to now. I switched to selling fish soup in 2006 after the market was upgraded, and have been selling it for 11 years since."*

Cik Kamisah (b. 1956), another long-time hawker at the market, recalled:

*"This stall has been with my family for more than 30 years: it belonged to my grandmother, then my aunt, followed by her daughter, before it was passed down to me. I was apprehensive at first because I wasn't sure if the residents would like my cooking, but thankfully things turned out well.*

*"We didn't use to sell nasi padang (a Malay rice dish served with meat and vegetables) when we*

*first started. Instead, we sold noodles and nasi lemak (a Malay coconut rice dish served with other condiments). One day, the neighbouring stall owner asked me to sell nasi padang since no other Malay stalls here sold the dish. I was a bit hesitant because it required more work, but eventually I made the change and have been selling the dish since then."*

Jimmy Lim (b. 1963), the owner of a noodle stall, spoke about the hawker profession and how it has evolved:

*"I moved to Tampines in 2000. At that time, I had just lost my job. I went to the Round Market to take a look, then I decided to take over one of the hawker stalls to sell food. Back then, I didn't know anything about selling hawker food - I had to learn everything from scratch. People told me my investment in the stall would be wasted, but I persevered. Eventually, I build up my customer base, and today, I have customers coming from all over the island to patronise my stall.*

*"When I first started my business, the food centre was already very popular and attracted large crowds of people. Customers came as early as 5am in the morning for breakfast. Nowadays, people patronise hawker centres looking for a specific dish or because they want to eat from famous food stalls. Food trends have also changed - food is always changing. I find that the younger generation is not very particular about food having a so-called 'traditional taste'. So my cooking style has evolved with the times, and over the years, I have refined the taste of my noodles based on customer feedback."*



## OUR TAMPINES HUB

1 Tampines Walk

Walk past the junction of Tampines Avenues 4 and 5 today and you are unlikely to miss Our Tampines Hub with its illuminated glass facade at night. This is Singapore's first integrated community and lifestyle hub which brings together a diverse range of services at one location.

Sited where the former Tampines Stadium and Tampines Sports Hall used to stand, the hub was first mooted in 2011 and construction works commenced after a series of public consultation sessions involving more than 15,000 Tampines residents. A section of the hub first opened its doors in 2016, and a grand opening was held later in 2017 to mark the completion of the building.

Our Tampines Hub embodies the spirit of a town that continues to innovate. Twelve government agencies are housed under the ambit of Singapore's first Public Service Centre, which allows residents to access various government functions and services conveniently.

The 5.3-hectare complex also includes an 800-seat hawker centre, a 32-lane bowling centre, six rooftop swimming pools, 20 badminton courts and spaces for a variety of community events. A new five-storey facility will house the Tampines Regional Library, which previously stood along Tampines Avenue 7. The old library, opened in 1994, was the first Regional Library established by the National Library Board.



An aerial view of the stadium at Our Tampines Hub, 2017  
Courtesy of Our Tampines Hub



Our Tampines Hub, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



The former Tampines Stadium, 2009  
© National Library Board, Singapore, 2017



The Tampines Rovers after winning the Singapore Cup in 2004  
Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts  
Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Sitting inside the hub is a 5,000-capacity stadium, the new home of the Tampines Rovers football club which was founded in 1945. Since the inception of the professional S-League in 1996, the club has been one of the most successful teams in Singapore's professional football scene, and has built up strong ties with the community.

Known for drawing vociferous crowds at the old Tampines Stadium, the club has won the S-League championship five times and the Singapore Cup thrice. Scores of notable players have worn the Tampines jersey and they include Quah Kim Song, his brothers and Dollah Kassim in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as Aleksander Duric and Noh Alam Shah in the 1990s and 2000s.

Quah, who won the Malaysia Cup in 1977 with Singapore, was one of the sport's most recognisable faces during an era when local football enjoyed mass public appeal. Quah's team-mate Dollah earned his nickname "Gelek King" on account of his skill with the ball and his dancing feet.

In more recent years, Bosnian-born Aleksander Duric enjoyed one of the most storied careers in Singapore's football history and retired at the age of 44 after playing 16 seasons and making his international debut appearance for his adopted country at 37. Noh Alam Shah, who partnered Duric with Tampines Rovers and the Singapore national team, played professionally in Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. Alam Shah won the ASEAN Football Federation championship twice with Singapore, and is the top goalscorer in the history of that championship.

## OUR TAMPINES GALLERY

Level 2, Tampines Regional Library,  
Our Tampines Hub

Located on the second floor of Tampines Regional Library, Our Tampines Gallery is a community gallery developed by the National Heritage Board in partnership with Tampines residents. The gallery presents Tampines' journey from its rural beginnings to one of Singapore's largest residential towns through the use of maps, images and artefacts, as well as shared memories from past and present residents.

The gallery hosts special exhibitions focusing on different aspects of Tampines' heritage and culture, and organise complementary programmes. It also offers various activities designed for children of various ages, including activity kits and worksheets.

Our Tampines Gallery is open every day from 10am to 9pm, except on Public Holidays. Admission to the gallery is free.



Interior of the gallery, 2017  
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



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# SUGGESTED SHORT TRAIL ROUTES

## TAMPINES TOWN TRAIL

1.5 hours; bus and walk

Conferred the World Habitat Award in 1991, the development of Tampines Town was a significant achievement in Singapore's public housing. This trail explores some of the town planning innovations introduced by the Housing & Development Board (HDB) as well as sites of everyday heritage that are part and parcel of the Tampines community.

(Note: You may want to embark on this trail in the morning as most of the stalls in Tampines Round Market & Food Centre are only open until around 3pm.)



Begin your journey with a visit to **Our Tampines Gallery**, located on level 2 of Tampines Regional Library at Our Tampines Hub. Here, you can learn more about the history of Tampines and enjoy the many community stories shared by past and present residents.

Next, make your way towards Festive Walk West exit to find the **World Habitat Award** commemorative sculpture located just behind the hub. Conferred by the Building and Social Housing Foundation and UN-Habitat in 1991, the award recognises the innovative town planning strategies adopted by HDB for Tampines Town, which made it a successful human settlement project that other countries can replicate.

After viewing the sculpture, stroll over to **Tampines Central Park**. The park is one of the many recreational green spaces in Tampines that also serve as connectors between neighbourhoods.

In this park, you can find HDB's iconic 1980s mangosteen and watermelon playgrounds, as well as a sculpture by the late artist and Cultural Medallion recipient, Ng Eng Teng.

From the park, proceed towards 25 Tampines St. 21 where you will arrive at the **Tampines Chinese Temple**. Located next to Block 231, this temple houses 12 constituent temples, including some that have been based in Tampines since the 19th century. Within the temple's compound, you may wish to keep an eye out for the two Tempinis trees (*Streblus elongatus*) from which Tampines derived its name.

Your last stop on this trail will be the **Tampines Round Market & Food Centre**, which has been a social hub for residents since its opening in 1983. Give yourself a treat for completing the trail by trying out local dishes from the hawker food stalls, a number of which have been listed in magazines and food blogs for their delicious offerings.

## RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS TRAIL

1.5 hours; bus and walk

Tampines is home to many religious institutions that speak of the diversity of its community. Some of the places of worship featured in this trail have been in Tampines for more than a century and reflect the town's rich cultural heritage. This trail allows visitors to discover these houses of faith, and explore the unique architecture and practices that define these institutions.

(Note: Most of these religious institutions are open to the public but be sure to follow any instructions on appropriate behaviour and attire.)

Start your journey at the majestic **Tampines Chinese Temple** situated at 25 Tampines St. 21. This temple houses 12 smaller constituent temples, including some that have been based in Tampines since the 19th century. An interesting feature of the temple is a 270m-long dragon sculpture that adorns the temple's perimeter. You can also look out for the two Tempinis trees planted within the temple's compound.



From the temple, proceed to **Masjid Darul Ghufuran**, located along Tampines Ave 5. Completed in 1990, the mosque's towering minaret made it a distinctive landmark in Tampines. It was the second largest mosque in Singapore at the point of construction, and is currently undergoing upgrading works since 2016 to further increase its capacity. The mosque is slated to re-open at the end of 2018.

Next, head over to **Tampines Link** where you will see a cluster of temples lining the road. Some of the temples such as the **Kew Sian King Temple** (7 Tampines Ave) have been based in Tampines since its early days while others have recently relocated from different parts of Singapore. Amongst these temples, the **Jiutiaoqiao Xinba Nadutan Temple** (95 Tampines Link) is perhaps best known for housing shrines of multiple faiths. Within the temple, one can find shrines dedicated to the Taoist Tua Pek Kong, the Hindu god Ganesha and the Malayan deity Datuk Gong.

Finally, make your way to the last stop on this trail and pay a visit to the **Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity** at Tampines St. 11. This Roman Catholic church has served the Catholic community in Tampines since its opening in 1990, and its main church hall features stained glass panels imported from Milan, Italy.

## GREEN SPACES TRAIL

1 hour; on bicycle

Tampines is home to a number of parks and green spaces, including some of which were former industrial sites. This cycling trail takes you through a few scenic locales including a converted quarry, sites where some of Tampines' former kampongs were once located, as well as **Lorong Halus**, a former landfill turned wetland.

Begin your journey at Tampines Ave 10 (as indicated on the map) with **Bedok Reservoir Park**, which was formerly a sand quarry. During the 1960s, there were more than 20 such quarries in Tampines which provided sand for the construction of HDB flats across Singapore. Most

of these quarries were filled in when Tampines Town was built in the late 1970s although this quarry was converted into a reservoir in 1986. Today, Bedok Reservoir Park is a popular recreation destination for joggers and water sports enthusiasts.

Continue along Tampines Ave 10 towards **Tampines Link** where you will find a cluster of temples lining the road. Some of the temples here such as the **Kew Sian King Temple** (7 Tampines Ave) have been in Tampines since the early 1900s while others were relocated from other parts of Singapore. On your right, you will see the **Tampines NEWater Service Reservoir**, which is marked by two inverted cone-shaped water tanks which hold up to 8,448 cubic metres of NEWater each. These futuristic-looking structures make for a unique photograph especially when taken at dusk.

At the end of the cluster of temples and along Tampines Ave lies a row of shophouses that was once a part of the **former Hun Yeang Village**, which takes its name from the 20th century plantation owner, Khoo Hun Yeang. These shophouses, along with Hun Yeang Road and Jalan Sam Kongsi Road, are among the few physical reminders left of the Tampines of the past. You may wish to have a short rest and a drink here before continuing on the trail.

Continue your journey down Tampines Ave 10 until you reach the junction intersecting Pasir Ris Industrial Dr 1 and make a left turn. At the end of the street, turn right into Pasir Ris Farmway 2 and follow the road as it curves left into Pasir Ris Farmway 3. You will arrive at **Lorong Halus Wetland**, which was formerly the site of the Serangoon Sludge Treatment Works. Established by the colonial Municipal Commission in 1941, the centre treated sewage and night soil until 1987. In the 1950s, part of the former swampland around the Sludge Works was used as a landfill until 1999. It was only in the 2000s that the site was rehabilitated and transformed into a wetland.



The cycling trail ends here, but you may wish to continue exploring the greenery around Lorong Halus. Alternatively, you can also cross the red bridge which connects Lorong Halus Wetland to Punggol Waterway, and continue to enjoy the natural beauty of Singapore's north-eastern region.



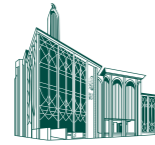
# HERITAGE SITES IN THE SUGGESTED SHORT TRAIL ROUTES



CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY



LORONG HALUS WETLAND



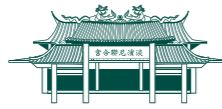
MASJID DARUL GHUFRAN



OUR TAMPINES HUB



TAMPINES CENTRAL PARK



TAMPINES CHINESE TEMPLE



TAMPINES ROUND MARKET & FOOD CENTRE



TEMPLE CLUSTER AT TAMPINES LINK



WORLD HABITAT AWARD SCULPTURE



**Tampines Town Trail**

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**Religious Institutions Trail**

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**Green Spaces Trail**

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