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QUEENSTOWN

SEMBAWANG

SENTOSA

SINGAPORE RIVER WALK

TAMPINES

TIONG BAHRU

WOODLANDS

WORLD WAR II

» CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Toa Payoh Central, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Toa Payoh has long been characterised as a pioneering Housing & Development Board (HDB) town. In the 1960s, the development of Toa Payoh town occurred at a pivotal point in Singapore's history. As the first town planned with comprehensive town amenities, the innovative public housing prototype would go on to serve as a model for the development of future residential towns in Singapore.

For the new residents who moved into Toa Payoh, their relocation from a kampong or crowded quarters in the city to HDB flats was a drastic change to their way of life. It was not the first time, however, that the area had been through sweeping transformations.

In the 19th century, gambier and pepper planters replaced the forests and the swamps Toa Payoh was named after with plantations that proliferated at an unsustainable rate. These plantations offered economic opportunities, which drew settlers who established kampongs and various cottage industries.

Numerous institutions were also founded during this period, including Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery, which stands out amidst the modern high-rise apartment blocks in the neighbourhood today, as well as others including those brought together in United Five Temples of Toa Payoh. Along with community institutions such as Chung Hwa Medical Institution, they continue to serve the people of Toa Payoh and beyond.

Today, iconic landmarks abound in Toa Payoh, such as the Dragon Playground and Town Park which were forerunners when introduced in this town but have since become common features in other housing estates. Despite having undergone town rejuvenations and changes in its landscape, Toa Payoh has retained the character of those who contributed to its development and evolution as reflected in the shared memories of residents, some of which have been captured in this companion guide through oral and historical accounts.

We hope this self-guided trail will help you to explore the rich history of Toa Payoh and discover the legacies of the communities that lived in this charming HDB town.

EARLY TOA PAYOH

From the early 1800s, settlement and economic activity in Toa Payoh were primarily driven by gambier and pepper planters. The planters cleared forests and swamps from which Toa Payoh derives its name, and started plantations in the hopes of earning their fortunes. Following the surveying and mapping of Toa Payoh by the British administration, and the assertion of colonial control through roads and police stations, these plantations gradually dwindled, marking a transition to new forms of livelihood in the kampongs.

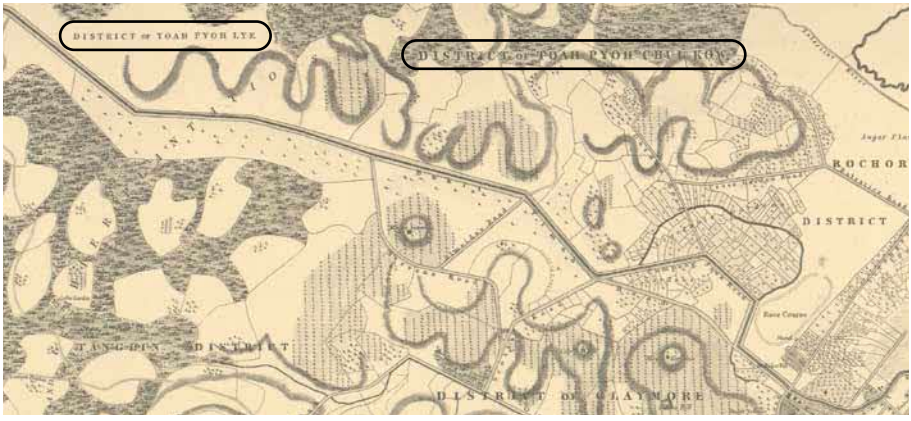
ORIGINS OF TOA PAYOH

The name Toa Payoh – spelt in its variant form of Toah Pyoh – first appeared in maps from the 1840s published by Government Surveyor John Turnbull Thomson. Thomson's 1842 map of Singapore shows that the southern part of Toa Payoh mainly comprised forests and swamps, with scattered plots of cleared land and plantations.

There have been a number of etymologies proposed for Toa Payoh, with the most likely being the Hokkien-Malay compound phrase for "big swamp". As postulated by H. T. Haughton in 1889, *toa* derives from the Hokkien and Teochew dialects for "big" while *payoh* is a loanword from *paya*, the Malay term for "swamp". The origin of the loanword *payoh* or *pyoh* is supported by an 1849 newspaper article on its usage by the Chinese community:

"In marshy or muddy places, where the erection of a regular path would be impossible or very expensive, the Chinese cut large trees which they throw into the marsh or mud in order to form an imperfect path. Such a path is then called Pyoh, to which the word Toah, long or large, or Kyjah or Soeh, small or little, is put to distinguish it from others situated in the same district."

Two instances of Toa Payoh – Toah Pyoh Lye (present-day Bukit Timah) and Toah Pyoh Chui Kow (Toa Payoh town today) – appear in Thomson's 1840s maps. Toa Pyoh Lye is thought to be named for its proximity to Toah Pyoh Chui Kow, as *lye* means "come to" in Hokkien, while it is not definitively known what *chui kow* refers to. Both names appear to be of Chinese-Malay construction and are likely to have been transliterated into English by Thomson.



Map showing "District of Toah Pyoh Lye" and "District of Toa Payoh Chui Kow" by John Turnbull Thomson, 1846
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Back then, the district of Toah Pyoh Chui Kow covered a larger expanse than the current town. Its boundaries extended to the northern section of MacRitchie Reservoir and what is now Bishan, Caldecott and Bukit Brown in the west, Potong Pasir and Bidadari in the east and Balestier in the south. It was renamed "Toah Pyoh" towards the end of the 1840s.

As for Toah Pyoh Lye, it was left of Toah Pyoh Chui Kow, with the district boundary separating the two situated in the area between Mount Pleasant and Bukit Brown. In the west, Toah Pyoh Lye stretched to what later became Upper Bukit Timah Road. By the early 20th century, Toah Pyoh Lye was renamed as the Bukit Timah district.

GAMBIER AND THE SHAPING OF TOA PAYOH

Before the arrival of the British in 1819, Toa Payoh was largely overlaid with freshwater swamp forests and mangrove forests, fed by major waterways such as Sungei Kallang (now Kallang River) and Sungei Whampoa. Gambier plantations operated by the Malays and Chinese already existed in Singapore, but not at the transformative scale of what was to follow.

The gambier and pepper industry expanded rapidly in tandem with Singapore's growth as a modern trading hub. The port handled not only gambier produced locally, but also from Riau and later Johor. Rising gambier prices from the 1830s further stimulated the growth of the plantations, for which large swathes of primary forest in Toa Payoh were felled.

By the mid-1800s, gambier and pepper contributed to an estimated 60 percent of Singapore's agricultural production, and these plantations covered nearly 27,000 acres on the island. Toa Payoh was no exception – its existing forests were cleared swiftly and replaced by gambier and pepper plantations to meet the rising demands of these produce.

As the plantations expanded into the island's interior, planters established *kangkars* and *bangsals*. A *kangkar* ("foot of the river" in Teochew) was a hub under the purview of the area's *kangchu* ("river outpost chief" in Teochew), from which agricultural produce was collected and sent to warehouses in town, often via river transport.

On the other hand, a *bangsal* ("shed" or "shelter" in Malay) incorporated residences for the plantation workers, stores, shops including opium and gambling dens, and the actual planting areas of gambier and pepper. As the community grew, settlers established kampong houses, fruit orchards and pigsties in the vicinity, and these settlements subsequently evolved into the early villages of Toa Payoh.

Gambier and pepper plantation, c. 1900
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Pepper plantation, 1890s
Gretchen Liu Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Part of a gambier bangsal*, 1890s*
Gretchen Liu Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

During the mid-1800s, Government Surveyor John Turnbull Thomson travelled up Sungei Kallang with a party of Europeans and Malay guides. An account from Thomson illustrates what a gambier plantation of the period as well as what Toa Payoh and Singapore's interior would have looked like:

"... we arrived at a gambier and pepper bangsal*, with its peculiar high-coned roof. Here we had a cup of tea from the hospitable Chinese, and then we sallied forth on a trudge through the jungle. We found the country undulating; alternate red hills and fat swamps, with large spaces of* lalang *grass."*

The areas occupied by *lalang* that Thomson referred to were former gambier plantation lands, which had been abandoned for more fertile soils. The shifting cultivation practised by gambier planters required freshly cleared land every 15 years or so, and large areas of forest had to be cut down to fuel the boiling

Illustration of part of a pepper plantation and bangsal *from German magazine Das Buch für Alle, 1860s*
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

cauldrons used to process the crops. The timber harvested from mangrove forests was also highly desired for tools, firewood and charcoal, leading to their rapid depletion.

As the colonial administration's authority was weak beyond the boundaries of the town, many gambier planters were able to cultivate land without legal title or land costs, and just as easily move on to new areas. However, not all planters were "squatters" without legal title, as Western writers of the period often termed them. The East India Company issued land titles to some landowners, such as prominent Toa Payoh plantation owner Seah Eu Chin.

The economic success of many gambier planters, their ability to operate without legal title and the rapid way in which they cleared the forests and used up arable soil led to many complaints from Western agriculturalists. Joseph Balestier, First American Consul to Singapore and owner of sugar plantations that neighboured Toa Payoh, wrote:

"The Chinese undertook the growth of gambier and pepper, and gradually have extended themselves over a considerable portion of the island. ... After having found a suitable location they squat upon it, not unfrequently without even applying for a license or cutting paper from the local authorities, a clearing is soon made in the forest, a part is planted in gambier and a part in pepper. ...

"The ground is gradually impoverished; becomes less valuable; lalang *soon begins to shew itself among the plants; as the cultivator is not the proprietor, but a squatter, and he has abundance of fresh ground at hand, and believing it to be more for his interest to begin a new plantation than to be at the expense of procuring manure to keep the old one in good order, it is not a matter of wonder that he should remove from place to place, and, as the locust, leave a tract of desolation behind him."*

After Thomson's pioneering surveys of Singapore beyond the town were conducted in the 1840s, the colonial government had a better picture of land use and environmental conditions in areas like Toa Payoh. Still, Toa Payoh retained a significant degree of inaccessibility due to the absence of well-constructed roads, and the authorities found it difficult to access its rural landscape or impose taxes on plantations.

In 1854, the Municipal Committee sought to inspect plantations in areas like Toa Payoh to "... ascertain their condition and extent, with the view to levy of Assessment ... and to note those in arrears." The committee sent out an official delegation comprising porters, guides, boatmen and Chinese interpreters led by a European police inspector, which visited more than 500 plantations and reported gambier produce worth $134,050 and pepper worth $157,775. The plantations, which also included areas planted with indigo and nutmeg, were estimated to house some 4,964 labourers.

In Toa Payoh itself, there were 15 gambier plantations, with some 300,000 bearing and 55,000 young trees, along with 22,700 bearing and 16,100 young pepper vines. The area also had 250 bearing and 1,940 young nutmeg trees. This information was later used to levy duties and land taxes on the plantation operators.

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLANTATIONS

As an export-oriented cash crop, the gambier economy suited pioneering communities seeking short-term returns from small capital investments. The industry was largely financed by the Chinese and many of the workers who toiled on the plantations of Toa Payoh were *sin keh* ("new guests/arrivals" in Teochew and Hokkien).

Recruited by labour agencies that received a portion of their wages, *sin keh* were drawn to Singapore and Malaya by the prospect of making enough money to return to China after a few years of work, although few managed to do so. Those who were able to fulfil their initial contracts often struck out on their own to start a smallholder plantation. Businesses in town provided them with equipment and capital for a proportion of revenue, but these terms were often more favourable to the businesses.

Seah Eu Chin, who was one of the wealthiest planters with extensive land holdings in Toa Payoh, wrote in 1849:

"The labouring class of people that emigrate to this Settlement are mostly very poor. Originally[,] they come with the intention of returning to their native land after a sojourn of three or four years, but out of 10[,] only one or two individuals are able to return after that time, and when they do retire[,] they do not take with them much wealth; still as the remembrance of home is not obliterated from their minds[,] they are willing to return even with a small fortune."

Seah's observations paint a picture of the gambier community as well as the lifestyles of the workers and the issues they faced. He estimated that there were "upwards of 40,000" Chinese workers involved in the production of gambier in the mid-1800s, with the majority of them being Teochews. On their wages, Seah noted:

"... the wages of those who cut the Gambier leaves and of those who boil the gambier are somewhat more [than general workers on the plantation], but neither is their rate of wages fixed, they are paid more or less in proportion as the price rises or falls. If a picul of gambier realises [one and a half] dollars[,] the monthly pay will be about three dollars. If a picul realises two dollars[,] the price of their labours will amount to about four dollars."

According to Seah, plantation workers lived in huts with wooden pillars and walls, as well as roofs of attap, which resembled houses built in the Malay style except that the houses were generally not raised. Walls would also be constructed of tree bark, *kajang* ("woven *nipah* leaves" in Malay) or plank timber. These workers had meals of rice, fish and vegetables, while those who had more money also consumed arrack liquor, poultry and pork.

They were also able to acquire tobacco, opium and *sireh* ("betel nut" in Malay), and would gamble for leisure. Many of these services and provisions were supplied by the *kangchu* (see page 4), merchants and capitalists. Despite toiling for many years in the harsh conditions of the plantations, a large number of workers remained in debt as they would spend their pay on these addictions.

Workers on a pepper plantation, 1900s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Aside from the abovementioned vices, workers in the gambier plantations also faced the threat of tigers in the early and mid-19th century. Thomson wrote:

"The interior of Singapore had something exciting to the young imagination; and the Sungei Kallang, at the time, was said to lead far into it. Tigers of the largest size roamed in the jungles; and the destruction of life was of daily occurrence. The gambier and pepper plantations, which the island was studded all over, promoted their increase. The gambier plant afforded an excellent cover; and the naked, lusty Chinaman, at work in all directions, provided a good of which the animal was exceeding fond."

SEAH EU CHIN AND GRAVE HILL

A native of Yuepu village in Chaozhou, China, Seah Eu Chin (1805-1883) arrived in Singapore in 1823. He established a trading business, before becoming a philanthropist and was one of the founders of the welfare organisation Ngee Ann Kun, which later evolved into Ngee Ann Kongsi.

As a leader of the Teochew community in Singapore, Seah worked with the British colonial administration to mediate in the 1851 Anti-Catholic riots and the 1854 Hokkien-Teochew riots. He was also a Justice of the Peace and an honorary magistrate. Seah married twice, first to Tan Meng Guat and subsequently to her sister Tan Meng Choo after Meng Guat passed away from smallpox.

In the 19th century, Seah Eu Chin's land holdings extended across significant stretches of Toa Payoh, Caldecott Estate and other areas. Having familiarised himself with the British legal and economic systems, Seah was among the earliest landowners who acquired legal title in Toa Payoh and other areas. The plantation lands he owned in the area included plots that later became MacRitchie Reservoir Park, as evidenced by a boundary marker inscribed with the words Seah Chin Hin (Chin Hin being the name of Seah's plantation) that was found there.

Seah also owned gambier and pepper plantations in River Valley, Bukit Timah, Thomson Road, Sembawang and Mandai among others, and acquired a reputation as Singapore's "Gambier King". Among Seah's lands were family burial grounds and bungalows, with the latter including a large residence named E Choon.

On 23 September 1883, Seah passed away in his house at North Boat Quay. Seah's coffin was borne on a catafalque from town to the family burial ground in Toa Payoh. Located within Chin Choon plantation, the burial ground later became known as Grave Hill. Today, the graves of Seah and his wives stand on a hill off Thomson Road within Seah's holdings.

Seah Eu Chin, 1860-1883
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

The tomb of Seah and his wives is built in the Southern Chinese style, with a tombstone and an altar backed against a semi-circular wall, a traditional shape that is sometimes likened to a horseshoe or a throne. The ground behind the tombstone is raised in the form of a hill, while the tomb also includes a granite boundary wall, a marble-tiled area and a separate altar dedicated to Tu Di Gong, the Chinese god of earth.

The tomb features panels with incised inscriptions, carved decorative motifs and inlaid multi-coloured ceramics in the *jian nian* ("cut and paste" in Mandarin) style. The central tombstone is inscribed with Seah's genealogical name, 佘邦從 (She Bang Cong),

Grave of Seah Eu Chin, 2014
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

and honorary titles conferred upon him by the Qing dynasty government in China. In reference to the Qing dynasty, the panel is crowned by the Chinese character 清 (qing). The stone altar features floral and animal motifs, while the tomb also includes stone columns topped with carved lions and other panels with ceramic inlays and inscriptions.

Grave Hill and Seah's tomb were marked on maps up to the 1960s, but its location became forgotten over the following decades as Toa Payoh was redeveloped. In 2012, the tomb was rediscovered and members of the Seah clan as well as others have continued maintaining the tomb and making offerings on special occasions.

Thomson Road, named after John Turnbull Thomson, c. 1910
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

THE EXPANSION OF COLONIAL AUTHORITY

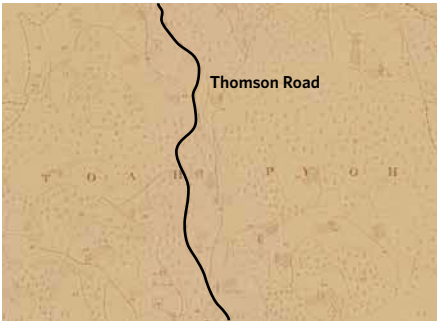
Between 1819 and the 1830s, the colonial administration was not able to exert their authority over outlying areas of Singapore on a consistent or practical basis. They lacked knowledge of the land, as areas including Toa Payoh had yet to be accurately surveyed, and the rural terrain paired with makeshift roads made physical access difficult. Alongside the absence of police stations in some areas beyond the town, the colonial government was unable to impose taxes, carry out land sales, or levy duties on agricultural produce including gambier.

John Turnbull Thomson was engaged as Government Surveyor in 1841 and sought to address this by surveying the island. Thomson's efforts included the creation of a system of land plots in areas like Toa Payoh, as well as landmark maps such as Plan of Singapore Town and Adjoining Districts, and Map of Singapore Island and its Dependencies.

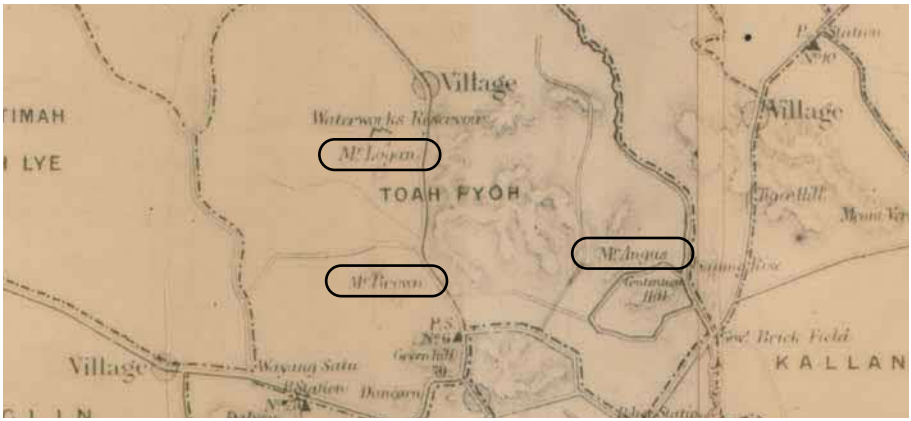
Thomson's work enabled the colonial government to create a reliable inventory of land which was vital for modern Singapore's early land administration system. The surveys also enabled the construction of roads into the interior and across the island, allowing the government to project its authority into areas such as Toa Payoh. One example was the construction of the historic Thomson Road police station in 1849.

The government's access to the plantations further inland and its subsequent ability to enforce taxation led to conflicts between different factions of planters, which included those led by secret societies such as Ghee Hin (Ngee Heng, associated with Teochews) and Ghee Hock (associated with Hokkiens). By the mid-1800s, these tensions drove most gambier planters away from Toa Payoh into the outlying areas of Singapore, and later into Johor.

The assertion of colonial authority brought considerable change to land ownership and



Map showing cultivated areas of Toa Payoh and Thomson Road (highlighted), 1849
Courtesy of Urban Redevelopment Authority



Map showing land parcels and their owners in Toa Payoh, who were mostly European, 1873
Courtesy of Urban Redevelopment Authority

occupation in Toa Payoh between the 1840s and 1860s. This is reflected in an 1873 map where much of the land had been demarcated into parcels under the government land administration system and sold to Europeans and Chinese merchants. While the land then largely comprised private estates and was no longer used for shifting cultivation, parts of Toa Payoh were still used for small-scale gambier plantations as the crop continued to be an important part of Singapore's economy until the 1890s.

In 1888, the district of Toa Payoh was included within Singapore's municipal limits, following the Municipal Ordinance enacted from January 1 that year. The inclusion of Toa Payoh within municipal limits was likely connected to the importance of MacRitchie Reservoir (completed in 1868) as the town's main source of water. The northern boundary of the reservoir was also the northern edge of the municipal limits, although today, the reservoir is generally not considered to be part of Toa Payoh.

Despite Toa Payoh's inclusion in the municipal boundary, the development of infrastructure and services in the area remained inconsistent. Oral histories and newspaper reports attest that infrastructure in Toa Payoh remained less developed compared to other municipal areas such as the town and its suburbs.

Map showing Toa Payoh within municipal boundaries, 1905
Courtesy of National Library Board

KAMPONG PAST

Map showing the different land uses of Toa Payoh, 1909
Courtesy of Survey Department Singapore

In the early 20th century, clusters of kampongs started flourishing in Toa Payoh, alongside the agricultural and cottage industries from which residents earned their livelihoods. Community and religious institutions originated in these kampongs, and some of them continue to operate in Toa Payoh today. By the 1960s, the area had grown into the third most populous district outside Singapore town.

THE GROWTH OF KAMPONGS

At the turn of the 20th century, while swamps covered much of the area between Braddell Road and what is today Toa Payoh Rise, residents started to use the lands in Toa Payoh for various economic activities and industries, including brick kilns and aquaculture ponds. The appearance of roads across Toa Payoh, as reflected in a 1909 map, showed that there was a growing population travelling in and out of the area.

By the 1920s, the number of kampongs in Toa Payoh had grown exponentially. In a 1924 map, dense residential clusters and rubber plantations can be found around the bases of Toa Payoh's hills.

Kampong house and vegetable seller from a postcard, late 19th-early 20th centuries
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

These kampong clusters comprised mainly houses of wood and attap construction, with some built on concrete foundations. A 1924 map reveals that the only brick and concrete buildings, termed "permanent buildings [of]

Map showing kampongs and surrounding plantations in Toa Payoh, 1924
Courtesy of Singapore Land Authority

masonry", within Toa Payoh were Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery, a scattered number of residences near the Balestier area, and a few houses along Thomson Road. Many of the swamps of the past no longer appear on the map, having been drained and replaced by rubber and banana plantations, vegetable farms and kampong houses.

The kampong clusters were known by multiple names and did not have fixed boundaries. They were most densely concentrated along major roads that started in the Balestier area and extended into Toa Payoh, including Boon Teck Road, Jalan Rajah, Ah Hood Road and Kim Keat Road.

Kampong Puay Teng Keng was one of the largest in Toa Payoh and was located in the area between Lorong 4 and Lorong 6 today. Kampong Hup Choon Hng stood between the present-day Lorong 8 market and Toa Payoh

Workers in a rubber plantation, 1900s
Lee Kip Lin Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Seu Teck Sean Tong Temple, with the latter institution owning much of the surrounding land in the 1950s.

The area along Ah Hood Road and extending from today's Toa Payoh Bus Interchange to

Boon Teck Road was known as Or Kio ("black bridge" in Hokkien. One of the less populated areas, Ann Siang Sua ("Ann Siang Hill" in Hokkien), stood behind Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery, while Kampong Potong Pasir stretched from the Lorong 8 area to the Housing & Development Board (HDB) estate of Potong Pasir today.

From the gambier days of the 19th century, the *sin keh* migrants lived in the attap and zinc-roofed huts established by their predecessors and community elders upon arrival in Singapore. These houses were generally managed by and for kinsmen with the same surname, which usually meant that they hailed from the same village in China.

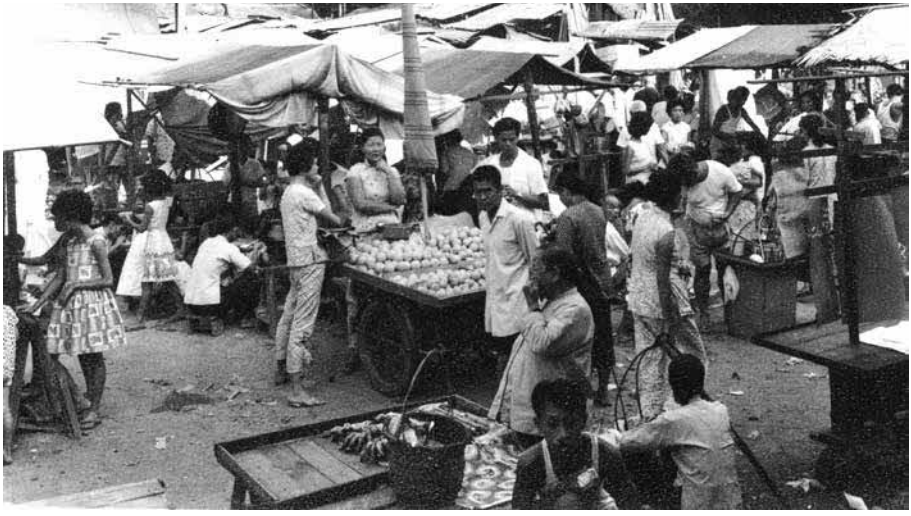
Kampong Puay Teng Keng was said to house mainly Hokkiens and Teochews, while Hup Choon Hng was a Teochew village. Or Kio included many Hainanese residents, while the Jalan Rajah area was predominantly Cantonese.

Former kampong resident Loh Sua Bah (b. 1908), who arrived in Singapore in the late 1930s from Nam Keh village in Puning, China, recalled the *sin keh* house he stayed in for Loh kinsmen near the Thomson Road police station at Or Kio:

"I learnt about the place when I was in China ... we didn't have to pay rent. When the sin keh *came to Singapore, they put up at [these] lodging houses. Then they would start to look for odd jobs ... some were farmers working on vegetable farms and some were workers. The attap hut was like a* kong si *[cooperative], when someone [needed] to employ labourers, he would go there to look for them. ... At that time, the pay was ... about 60 cents a day. When I was a newcomer here, [I ate at the hut] congee with preserved black beans and dried anchovies. ... I could have a meal for two or three cents."*

As the kampongs of Toa Payoh grew, amenities to support the population increased. These included provision shops, *kopitiams* (coffeeshops), street hawkers, barbers, medical halls and schools, all of which were generally located in the kampongs or within walking distance. There were drawbacks to kampong life however, including the threat of fire to the mainly wooden houses, inadequate transport infrastructure and the need to access water through shared standpipes or wells.

Despite the increase in population, the absence of proper roads and electricity networks exposed the inferior infrastructure



Village market in Toa Payoh, 1950s
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

of the area. Unlike the more affluent Balestier area where the roads were mostly constructed by the government and well-maintained, the majority of the roads in Toa Payoh were little more than laterite tracks and paths, which became almost impassable after heavy rains. Due to poor road conditions, car journeys into Toa Payoh from the main roads could take more than half an hour.

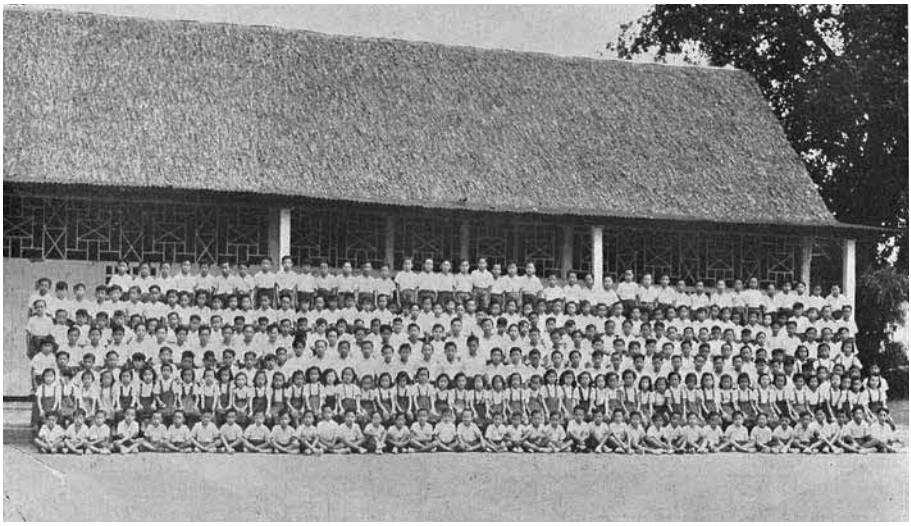
As the government's electricity network did not cover much of the area then, lighting was generally supplied through kerosene lamps. This gap, however, was later filled by private electricity suppliers, such as Quah Wee Ho (b. 1935), who sold electricity from fuel-powered generators to the kampong households. Quah estimated that he supplied electricity to some 1,200 households in Toa Payoh from 1954 to the mid-1960s and recalled:

"... the villages lacked electricity. Thus, we thought if we set up an electricity supply station, there should be business [demand]. Moreover, the income should be good. [We had stations] at Boon Teck Road, one was at Jalan Rajah Road, and one more at Potong Pasir. [The government at the time] did not think about electricity supply for [kampong] people. The rural area was so big, what were the people's needs – they didn't care. That was why we could do this business."

View of a kampong shop, Sin Moh Lee, 1963
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Residents of a Toa Payoh kampong at a public standpipe, 1960s
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Kampong road in Toa Payoh made from macadam, which was an improvement on the laterite paths of the past, 1963
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Year-end school photo of Chee Hwa School founded by Chee Tian Keng Temple, 1951
Courtesy of Chee Tian Keng Temple

KAMPONG PUAY TENG KENG

Kampong Puay Teng Keng was named after a local legend, in which the Taoist deity Tua Pek Kong flew across the sky before landing at the site where Puay Teng Keng Temple ("Flying Above Temple" in Hokkien, today's Chee Tian Keng Temple) was eventually built. Many of the residents in Kampong Puay Teng Keng had the surname Ng and hailed from the district of Tong'an in Xiamen, China.

Kampong Puay Teng Keng was the most populated kampong in Toa Payoh then, with a market of about 30 stalls, a school, a *wayang* (street opera) stage, as well as a village fire station with a 21-metre-tall tower. The temple and its *wayang* stage served as a community hub that was used for social gatherings and village meetings. Members of the temple also helped establish Chee Hwa School (now defunct), which had 700 to 800 students enrolled in the 1950s.

With little access to support or services from the colonial government, the residents of

Devotees of Chee Tian Keng Temple and residents of Kampong Puay Teng Keng formed a volunteer firefighting team in the 1950s, undated
Courtesy of Chee Tian Keng Temple

Kampong Puay Teng Keng had to rely on each other. One of the ways in which this communal spirit manifested itself was through the kampong's firefighting team, which kept a vigil from the watch tower for fires in the area and even travelled to assist during the infamous Bukit Ho Swee fire on 25 May 1961. Kampong resident Quah Wee Ho remembered:

"At that time there were frequent fires in the kampong, so the villagers organised themselves.

We raised funds to buy the equipment. We bought from the army ... helmets, the water pumps for firefighting, the pails we carry on our backs, and other firefighting equipment. We approached the people from the fire station to teach us, train us. You can say we were the best-equipped civilian organisation [to fight fires]."

A culture of mutual care also existed in Kampong Puay Teng Keng and other villages in Toa Payoh. Former hawker Heng Joon Chaik (b. 1938) recalled:

"... if there was a death in a family, youngsters like us, we would take a candle, red candles and distribute to every household ... every family on that night would light the candle and stick it in front of their door. On the day of the funeral, the coffin had to be carried, carried out to the road. ... Sometimes had to carry very far. Everyone was very cooperative ... [and] very united."

Kampong Puay Teng Keng fire post's 21-metre-tall watch tower, early 1960s
Courtesy of Chee Tian Keng Temple

MAKING A LIVING IN KAMPONGS

Residents of the kampongs in Toa Payoh earned a living through agriculture and cottage industries. The landscape in Toa Payoh, in particular, was very suitable for farming activities, as seen in a survey by the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) conducted in 1954, which described some 600 acres of Toa Payoh as "land which we consider to be the most fertile on the island", and which constituted "an important factor in the Singapore food supply". Most of the vegetable farms in Toa Payoh (known during the colonial era as market gardens) were located near Sungei Kallang.

Aside from cultivating vegetables, households generally reared chickens, ducks and pigs. While the majority of the households in Toa Payoh did not depend entirely on farming for their livelihoods, most were likely to own and cultivate small vegetable plots and fruit trees, or raise poultry for their own consumption.

Farm at Potong Pasir, 1962
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

The farms in Toa Payoh contributed greatly to Singapore's food supply, which was disrupted by a flood in 1954. The flood inundated some 350 acres of farmland in Toa Payoh and Potong Pasir, ruining vegetable crops and farming activities. This led to an estimated 60 percent drop in island-wide food production, causing an increase in the prices of vegetables and poultry.

WORLD WAR II AND THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

Toa Payoh was not spared during World War II, where the Japanese invasion of Singapore began with landings on the northwestern coast on the night of 8 February 1942.

Toa Payoh lay between the advancing Japanese forces and several significant targets: the city, Woodleigh waterworks along the Toa Payoh/Potong Pasir boundary and a wireless transmitting station at St. Michael's area, not far from Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery.

Professor Peter Henry Gay Allen (b. 1920), who was part of the 18th Division of the 53rd Brigade, recalled the Japanese artillery bombardments of Allied troops in Toa Payoh, along with injury to civilians and villages. Allen's company had taken up positions along Braddell Road, while the company headquarters was set up in a school at the junction of Balestier Road and Boon Teck Road. The area had a village nearby, and Allen recalled:

"There was a little Chinese settlement there. And it was very distressing. All sorts of awful things were happening. A shell landed on the settlement, and [an] old Chinese gentleman was wounded, we had to get him to hospital."

During the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945), large areas of farmland in Toa Payoh were requisitioned by the Japanese authorities. Across Singapore, vegetable farms had either

Aerial view of Balestier Road with Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery (top left), 1946
British Royal Air Force Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

come directly under the control of military units or the Syonan Municipality, although a minority of farmers were able to escape detection and cultivate their crops in secret.

Civilians from across Singapore were recruited to work on agricultural plots in Toa Payoh that produced vegetables and poultry, which they were only allowed to sell to the Japanese. Letchumanan Masillamani (b. 1931), who worked on one of the farm plots during the Occupation, recounted his experience:

"Toa Payoh was cordoned off and controlled by the Japanese. The area was mostly tapioca plantations, vegetable plantations and pigsties, and there were fish ponds where people grew water lilies to feed the pigs. The Japanese controlled the food production exclusively for themselves, they provided the feed for the chicken and the farmers could not sell to anybody else.

"The vegetable farms grew sawi *[mustard greens],* bayam *[spinach], brinjal, sweet potatoes, long beans, French beans and tapioca. All the food from the area would be taken by the Japanese. The locals were starving and could never get anything like fresh meat and vegetables. [Even if] they walked the whole of Toa Payoh they could not buy anything there."*

Despite the hardships posed by the Occupation, Toa Payoh's population increased as many from the city and other parts of Singapore sought refuge in the area which was perceived to be safer due to its rural nature. Many of those who moved to Toa Payoh continued staying there after the Occupation.

In addition to farming, households also made a living through various cottage industries and trades. Quah Wee Ho, who was a kampong resident, (b. 1935) described the occupations of the Chinese communities in the area:

"From Boon Teck Road to Kim Keat area, they were Hokkiens. From Braddell Road coming into Hup Choon Hng ... they were Teochews. In the Jalan Rajah area, they were Cantonese. The Cantonese were mostly doing rattan work. The Teochews ran businesses and made moonshine. As for the Hokkiens, they were in the tau kwa *[firm tofu] business and sawmill business. There were also minorities living in the villages, there were Hainanese and also Hakkas."*

Of the cottage industries active in Toa Payoh then, over half were involved in the making of soybean curd. In fact, Toa Payoh was known for its production of soy beancurd, which was supplied to coffee shops, eateries and markets in the surrounding areas.

Entrepreneurs also opened small factories and workshops in Toa Payoh, producing a diverse range of products including soy sauce, wooden toys, clogs, rattan, cane goods and pottery. A number of these factories can still be found in the Balestier area today.

URBAN KAMPONGS OF SINGAPORE

In the 1950s, the post-war population boom gave rise to settlements known as urban kampongs, a number of which were located in Toa Payoh. Driven by rapid population increases and overcrowding in the city, people relocated to urban kampongs – rapidly constructed houses mainly made from plank timber or scrap metal walls, with roofs of thatched attap, zinc or corrugated iron. These kampongs were situated mostly on the fringes of the city and around the main radial roads.

It was estimated that there were more than 50 urban kampongs in Singapore during that period, and the houses in these settlements met the high demand for affordable rental housing in post-war Singapore. These kampongs housed the some 64,000 people living in Toa Payoh at the time, which made

it the third most populous district outside the Central Area as recorded in SIT's Master Plan of 1955.

Many of the residents of the urban kampongs were generally either former residents of the city, or migrants to Singapore following the post-1946 civil war in China and the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960).

Living in urban kampongs such as Toa Payoh allowed residents a convenient commute to the city, while affording them physical space to supplement their diets by growing vegetables and rearing poultry or pigs. The ability of the urban kampong residents to shape the physical environment of their kampongs, through small-scale agriculture, cottage industries and other economic activities, was reflected in an assessment by SIT that "the attap areas change almost from day to day with the result that even a map prepared one year previously is certain to be out of date".

Despite the benefits of urban kampongs, the developers who built these kampongs were generally unregulated and built residences without planning approval or at times, property titles. They would opportunistically build on former plantation or agricultural land, next to burial grounds and on swampy areas, as well as on state and private land approved for time-limited occupation.

From 1947, SIT attempted to clear some of the urban kampongs. However, resettlement into SIT flats was rejected by most residents on the basis that flat rentals were too expensive and the relocation sites offered were too far from their workplaces. Some organised groups even assaulted SIT officers and the police, before ejecting them from the kampongs.

By the mid-1950s, the City Council adopted a more definitive stance on clearing urban kampongs which were classified as unauthorised housing. Some teams sent to demolish urban kampongs were attacked by residents, including in Toa Payoh, and kampong clearance continued to be marked by resistance and instances of physical violence into the early 1960s.

THE SHADY SIDE OF TOA PAYOH

Up to the early 1960s, the relatively inaccessible nature of Toa Payoh and its predominantly rural environment provided cover for a range of illegal activities. These included opium and gambling dens, unlicensed distilling of *samsu* (a rice-based liquor consumed in Singapore and Malaya) as well as violence from gang fights and other activities.

Kampong resident Quah Wee Ho (b. 1935) remembered:

*"[Toa Payoh] was a very complicated area, a very shady place ... kidnapping, trafficking, opium trading, moonshine, they were all in there. Secret societies were concentrated there. They sent [*samsu*] everywhere, coffee shops, provision shops. At that time, moonshine was a very good business. In Toa Payoh, I knew at least a few tens of places that made moonshine."*

In the post-WWII period, unregulated distillers made illegal *samsu* in rural areas such as Toa Payoh to meet the high demand with their cheaper product. The swampy, forested environment of Toa Payoh afforded distillers opportunities to hide from police and customs officers, as well as stash drums of *samsu* mash.

A newspaper article described the kampongs of Toa Payoh then as being "a distillers' paradise ... this huge area included Potong Pasir, Braddell Road and Kim Keat Avenue". During raids, customs officials would often confiscate up to 30 drums of *samsu* mash,

hidden in places such as chicken coops, ponds, unused houses and vehicles.

The area's inaccessibility and the close-knit communities in the kampongs meant that outsiders, such as police and customs officers, were easily identified or deterred from entering Toa Payoh. Former hawker Heng Joon Chaik (b. 1938) remembered:

"As long as a stranger entered the village, everyone would know. Because if you were to walk through a village, you had to walk a winding route so everyone would know. The moment you stepped into the village entrance everyone would notice you, a stranger. Hence, it was very hard for government officials to enter.

"[The village residents] were united in protecting the kampong. That was good, but you could say [that this allowed] a lot of shady things [to happen]. It's only natural, being in a kampong. [Government officers] would disguise themselves, disguise in this way and that, but no ... we would usually know very well. [We] ... very rarely got sabotaged."

The notoriety of the gangs of Toa Payoh also intimidated law enforcement officers. Quah recalled that police and government officials would only enter Toa Payoh in groups. Individual officers who entered the kampongs were more likely to be collecting bribes, with Quah adding: "... customs officers, if they went in, they must be there to collect 'black money' from the moonshine makers".

The gangs of Toa Payoh were also known for robberies and gang fights that erupted across coffee shops, kampong gathering places and even in the vicinity of Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery. Robberies and fights continued to occur into the 1970s, with Toa Payoh being labelled the "Chicago of Singapore" in newspapers, before gradually becoming less prevalent in later decades.

Samsu distillery seized by custom officers, 1950
George Kennedy Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

Temple procession along Jalan Rajah, 1950s
Courtesy of Chee Tian Keng Temple

Religious and community institutions in Toa Payoh have played a key role in serving residents from the area and beyond by providing spiritual, educational and medical services. Today, these institutions continue in these vital undertakings even as the communities they serve evolve.

LIAN SHAN SHUANG LIN MONASTERY (莲山双林寺)

184 Jalan Toa Payoh

Founded in 1898 and completed in 1909, Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery is the oldest Buddhist monastery in Singapore. Also known by its Hokkien name Siong Lim Si, its name translates to "Twin Groves of the Lotus Mountain" in Mandarin, a reference to a Buddhist tradition that the Buddha attained nirvana while sitting in a grove of *sala* trees in Kunshinagara, India.

The monastery's Hall of Celestial Kings and Mahavira Hall (Tian Wang Dian and Da Xiong Bao Dian respectively) were gazetted collectively as a National Monument in 1980. It also houses one of the most extensive collections of Buddhist art in Singapore, comprising statues and sculptures, steles and inscriptions in wood and metal, censers, beam inscriptions and works of calligraphy.

Founding and early history

Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery was founded by Hokkien merchant and community leader Low Kim Pong (1838-1909), and a group of monks and nuns from Hui'an County, Quanzhou, China. It is said that Low and his son Kay Siang dreamt of a figure bathed in golden light appearing from the west, and the pair waited at Singapore's waterfront until a boat carrying 12 Buddhist monks and nuns arrived. Regarding the group as the divinely-inspired figures of his dream, Low invited them to stay in Singapore and spread the Buddhist faith, promising to build a monastery.

Hall of Celestial Kings in Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery, 2014
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Postcard of Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery, c. 1905
Robert Feingold Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Original Shuang Lin Cheng Huang Temple before its reconstruction, 1900s
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

The Buddhist group comprised members of the Xiao family of Hui'an, who had converted to Buddhism together and were ordained as monks and nuns by the abbot of the Xi Chan Monastery in Fuzhou, Fujian. They included Xian Hui and Xing Hui, who became the first two abbots of Shuang Lin, and their mother Ci Miao.

Low acquired and donated 12 acres of land in Toa Payoh, and employed skilled craftsmen, masons, painters and carvers from Fujian, to construct the monastery. In addition to contributions from members of the local and regional Chinese community, Sri Lankan jeweller Balage Porolis de Silva and his family also contributed funds and helped oversee the building of the monastery. Some estimates have placed the cost of the temple and monastery's construction in the region of half a million Straits dollars. Low, however, did not live to see the completion of the temple and monastery in 1909.

Shuang Lin Cheng Huang Temple

Located next to the monastery, Shuang Lin Cheng Huang Temple dates to at least 1903, as recorded on a stele along with the names of those who contributed to the temple's construction. Originally named Temple of Vast Fortune, it was renamed Cheng Huang ("City God" in Mandarin) in line with the Taoist deity it enshrines.

While the temple enshrines Cheng Huang and other Taoist deities who are regarded as protectors of dharma in Buddhism, it is managed by the monastery, with the latter's Buddhist monks conducting Taoist rituals and ceremonies. This practice reflects the inclusive and diverse nature of Buddhism in Singapore.

Architecture and art

The architecture of the monastery is inspired by that of the 5th-century Xi Chan Monastery in Fuzhou, China. Like Xi Chan, Shuang Lin is organised in the *cong lin* (layered forest) style,

where the monastery's layout and architecture facilitate the ordered daily routines of the monks according to the principles of Buddhism.

Traditional *cong lin* architecture aligns buildings along a north-south axis and includes areas for preaching and ritual duties such as *puja* (worship rituals, also spelt *pooja*) and recitals of scripture, education, and communal activities. Common elements of *cong lin* monasteries include Bell and Drum Towers containing instruments for the chanting of sutras and prayers, as well as the use of *mu yu* ("wooden fish" in Mandarin) and cloud board wooden instruments to sound announcements.

The monastery's symmetrical layout follows the architectural conventions of monasteries and temples in Zen Buddhism, with influences of *feng shui* and traditional Chinese architecture. Entrances are south-facing, and the main buildings – Hall of Celestial Kings, Mahavira Hall, as well as Dharma Hall and sutra library – are located along a central north-south axis. Monastic quarters and facilities are situated on the sides, along with Dragon Light Pagoda and Guan Yin Hall, which enshrines Guan Yin Pu Sa (also known in Sanskrit as Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva).

The architectural styles of Fuzhou, Quanzhou and Zhangzhou in Fujian as well as Chaozhou in Guangdong, China, are also showcased in the structures of the monastery. These different styles, united under the traditional Chinese courtyard layout concept known as *he yuan*, reflect the diverse roots of the immigrant Chinese in Singapore.

Ritual instruments such as mu yu *("wooden fish" in Mandarin) are used during rituals and to sound announcements, 2022*
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Guan Yin Pu Sa in Guan Yin Hall, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Hall of Celestial Kings (Tian Wang Dian) and its courtyard, 1900s
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

HALL OF CELESTIAL KINGS (天王殿)

Named after the guardian deities of the cardinal directions in Zen Buddhism, this hall built in 1905 enshrines the Four Celestial Kings as well as Maitreya Bodhisattva and Skanda Bodhisattva. The latter deity, also known as Wei Tuo Pu Sa, is a fixture in the front halls in Zen Buddhist institutions. As the Skanda Bodhisattva is depicted with a *vajra* (spiritual weapon in Buddhism and Hinduism) pointing downwards, it signifies by tradition that Shuang Lin can offer food and shelter to visiting monks.

The roof ridges of the hall feature dragon sculptures, *jian nian* ("cut and paste" in Mandarin) ceramic mosaic ornamentation, as well as a gilded and sculpted *dou gong* (interlocking bracket system) visible under the eaves. In addition to its structural purpose, the intricate designs of the *dou gong* showcase the artistry of workmen hired from various regions of China to work on the monastery.

MAHAVIRA HALL (大雄宝殿)

Built in 1904, Mahavira Hall has been described as the "centrepiece of the monastery's expression of faith" and is where the monks perform their daily rituals. The hall enshrines Amitabha Buddha, Sakyamuni Buddha and Bhaisajyaguru Buddha.

Maitreya Bodhisattva in Hall of Celestial Kings, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Skanda Bodhisattva in Hall of Celestial Kings holding a vajra *(spiritual weapon in Buddhism and Hinduism), 2022*
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Double-tiered roofs of Mahavira Hall incorporate Fuzhou and Quanzhou architectural styles, 1950s
Lee Kip Lin Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Mahavira Hall enshrines Amitabha Buddha, Sakyamuni Buddha and Bhaisajyaguru Buddha, 1920s
Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

The Buddha statues are framed from above by *zao jing* (carved caisson ceilings), which are crafted to evoke the canopies that often feature in Buddhist art. Installed behind the three Buddhas and facing Dharma Hall is a statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, made of white jade from Myanmar and in place since 1903.

The Bell Tower and Drum Tower, completed in 1907, stand on either side of the entrance to Mahavira Hall and its courtyard. Traditionally, the bell and drum in each tower are sounded 108 times each morning and evening to signify the easing of the 108 troubles of humankind described in Buddhism.

Instruments in the Bell and Drum Towers are sounded 108 times each morning and evening by monks, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

POH CHUNG TIAN CHOR SIAN TONG (普忠殿助善堂)

201 Lorong 6 Toa Payoh

Poh Chung Tian Chor Sian Tong, also known as Poh Tiong Beo, started as a shrine established in the 1920s at 8 Nankin Street. It relocated to Toa Payoh in 1957 and is named after the Taoist deities Pu'An Fo Zu and San Zhong Wang ("Three Central Kings" in Mandarin). It is believed that this temple is the only one in Singapore to enshrine San Zhong Wang, while other deities enshrined here include Lord Qiu, Marshal Ang, Wu Gu Xian Di and Guan Di.

The deities known as San Zhong Wang comprise three individuals from the Song dynasty (960-1279CE) in China, namely Wen Tian Xiang, Zhang Shi Jie and Lu Xiu Fu. The trio were regarded as patriotic officials and military leaders who resisted the invading Mongol army and were deified by the people of Tong'An, Xiamen, China.

The original shrine included deity statues and incense brought to Singapore from a San Zhong Wang temple in Hongtang town, Tong'An. Its devotees included many who operated lighters on the Singapore River as well as dock workers. A gradual increase in the temple's worshippers necessitated a move to

Poh Chung Tian Chor Sian Tong at its first location in Toa Payoh, c. 1960s
Courtesy of Poh Chung Tian Chor Sian Tong

Street procession at Toa Payoh during the relocation to the new temple, 1971
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Members of the temple at Nankin Street, undated
Courtesy of Poh Chung Tian Chor Sian Tong

Poh Chung Tian Chor Sian Tong at its present location, c. 1970s
Courtesy of Poh Chung Tian Chor Sian Tong

Poh Chung Tian Chor Sian Tong, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

larger premises in Toa Payoh. However, the first site was subject to frequent flooding and so the temple relocated across the street to its present location in 1971.

Built in the traditional Hokkien style of architecture, the temple's martial theme is expressed by a pair of horse statues at its entrance, which are sculpted with bow and arrow, a sword and flags of three colours. The latter symbolises the signalling system used for news and messages borne by riders on horseback during the Song dynasty.

TOA PAYOH SEU TECK SEAN TONG (大芭窑修德善堂)
2 Lorong 6 Toa Payoh

Established in 1942, Toa Payoh Seu Teck Sean Tong was first situated in Kampong Hup Choon Hng. The kampong, which was cleared during the redevelopment of Toa Payoh town, was located between the Lorong 8 market and where the current temple stands today. The temple building at its present site was completed in 1959, and enshrines the Taoist deity Song Da Feng as its patron saint, as well as other deities. The worship rituals and

Toa Payoh Seu Teck Sean Tong, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

cultural traditions of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism are practised here.

The Seu Teck temples in Singapore and Malaysia trace their roots to a temple in Da Wu village in Fu Yang town, Chao'an district in China. The temple in Kampong Hup Choon Hng was originally of timber and attap construction and contained incense transferred from the temple Seu Teck Sean Tong Yiang Sin Sia (currently located at Bedok) as part of the tradition for establishing a new temple.

Charity is a central part of Toa Payoh Seu Teck Sean Tong's ethos, in line with the philosophical principles laid down by Song Da Feng, who was a Song dynasty monk known for his philanthropy and later deified. During the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945), the temple was one of the initiators of the Blue Cross Charitable Institutions network, a group which collected the bodies of war victims for burial. Members of the temple also helped with the distribution of porridge as part of the temple's relief efforts during the Japanese Occupation.

The temple opened its medical wing in 1967, under which its clinic continues to provide free medical services to all. From the 1990s, expansions to the temple included a hall housing ancestral tablets and the Gui De Lou columbarium.

The temple also donated S$1.5 million in 1995 to establish Toa Payoh Seu Teck Sean Tong – National Kidney Foundation Dialysis Centre in Yishun and still maintains its annual funding for the centre's operations. A second dialysis centre, with a S$2.2 million contribution by Seu Teck Sean Tong, will open at Block 225 at Toa Payoh Lorong 8 in 2023. The temple also regularly donates to other organisations and social causes.

Toa Payoh Seu Teck Sean Tong with the Blue Cross symbol on its facade, 1964-1972
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Temple hall and main shrine, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

TRADITIONS AND FESTIVALS

One of the traditions practised at Toa Payoh Seu Teck Sean Tong Temple is *fu ji* (also known as planchette writing) which is a method of divination practiced since at least the Song dynasty. Temple devotees hold the belief that *fu ji* is a medium for the transmission of messages from Song Da Feng and other deities.

The tradition involves individuals known as *ji* masters, two of whom move a y-shaped stylus crafted from willow wood to write messages in a pan filled with sand. For devotees, the divinity's insights inform their life decisions and resolve personal questions. *Ji* masters are required to cultivate sincerity, inner peace and morality. *Fu ji* sessions are held at the temple on the first and 15th of each lunar month, except the seventh lunar month.

Every five years, the temple carries out a reconsecration ceremony for its enshrined divine images, including that of Song Da Feng. The ceremony involves the collection of sandalwood incense, tea leaves and pure water. These elements symbolise communication with the divine (through ascending incense smoke), an offering from earth to heaven, as well as life and cleansing respectively.

The collection dates and locations are divined through *fu ji* sessions. The ceremony includes the transport of the patron saint's image and

Fu ji *practitioner chanting the Heart Sutra before the divination, 2022*
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Talismans are burnt in the sand pan in preparation for fu ji, *2022*
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Fu ji *practitioners writing messages in the sand pan, 2022*
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Deity statue of Song Da Feng, which is re-gilded every five years, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

incense urn in a sedan chair to collection points, followed by the temple's musical troupe, members and devotees.

As the founders of the temple largely comprised Teochew devotees, the temple continues to express its Teochew heritage during Lantern Festival, held on the 15th day of the first lunar month. During the festival, the temple distributes traditional "sugar lion" cakes, dyed an auspicious pink-red, as well as oranges and lanterns to devotees. These items symbolise prosperity and blessings in Teochew culture.

Other significant dates for the temple include Spring and Autumn festivals, observed with the chanting of Buddhist sutras accompanied by classical Chaozhou music as devotees express filial piety to their ancestors. During the seventh lunar month, commonly known as Hungry Ghost Festival, the Ullambana sutra is chanted at the temple while devotees make offerings of food and joss paper.

Tree Shrine at Block 177 before the tree was damaged during a thunderstorm in 2013, undated
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

TREE SHRINE AT BLOCK 177

177 Toa Payoh Central

The Tree Shrine at Block 177 (also known as Ci En Ge) started as a site of worship established at a banyan tree that survived the redevelopment of Toa Payoh in the 1960s. Today, Ci En Ge enshrines Guan Yin (Buddhist-Taoist Goddess of Mercy) as well as Taoist deities Tian Gong, Datuk Kong and Tua Pek Kong.

This tree shrine was built by devotees at the foot of a banyan tree which has been regarded as sacred since the late 1960s.

Tree Shrine at Block 177, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Devotees paying respects at the shrine, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

During redevelopment, kampongs, temples, village schools and numerous other buildings were cleared, but the tree appeared to resist demolition and gained a reputation as a *shen shu* ("deity tree" in Mandarin) over the years.

Yao Chee Liew, then an engineer with the Housing & Development Board (HDB), recalled:

"There was a tree beside a temple [at] Toa Payoh Central. Some tractor drivers refused to touch the tree for spiritual reasons. Others were called in to do so but tried and failed to move the tree."

In 2013, a section of the tree including its crown broke off during a storm, causing damage to the shrine. As the tree shrine had religious, social and heritage significance to residents of Toa Payoh and beyond, Toa Payoh Merchants' Association raised around S$70,000 from its members and public donations to restore the shrine and stabilise the tree.

CHURCH OF THE RISEN CHRIST

91 Toa Payoh Central

Inaugurated in 1971, the Church of the Risen Christ was the first Catholic church in Toa Payoh town. Prior to the church's establishment, the Catholic community of Toa Payoh had been holding its activities and programmes at Ho Ping Centre at Block 92, and its Masses in a hall at HDB's East Area Office in the 1960s.

Having acquired the land upon which the Church of the Risen Christ stands today in 1969, the community led by its priests Fr. Pierre Abrial and Fr. Adrian Anthony began raising funds for a church building. Some $450,000 was collected for the construction of the church, and the Church of the Risen Christ was officially opened on 3 July 1971 by Michel Olcomendy, the first Archbishop of Singapore.

The early days of the church were lively, as recalled by the second priest of the church Fr. Adrian Anthony (b. 1943):

"... it was often overcrowded during Mass. The church's capacity was something like 1,500, but I remember during some festive occasions like Christmas, we had crowds of over 2,000 overflowing the church ... !"

In a church publication, parishioner Vincent Gabriel also detailed his unique memories of people visiting the church:

Mass led by Fr. Pierre Abrial at HDB East Area Office's function hall before the construction of the church building, 1960s-1970s
Courtesy of Church of the Risen Christ

Church of the Risen Christ, 1971
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

"Many of the early converts to Catholicism in Toa Payoh came from traditional Chinese [backgrounds]. There was an elderly Chinese woman who would go for Mass early and book the whole pew for her friends using handkerchiefs.

"The [early] church-goers liked the Christmas pageant so much that they brought their non-Catholic friends to watch. Many young women hoping to conceive would touch [the figure of] baby Jesus and then their abdomens. [At another time], rumours were floating around the Lorong 4 market that the church was lucky ... some people wrote their lottery numbers on the palms of their hands as they went to receive Holy Communion."

Beyond the church's services, the church's priests and volunteers would organise tuition classes, childcare and other community care programmes, which provided social support to new residents in Toa Payoh.

Volunteer groups known as Legion of Mary praesidiums conducted home visits and other church activities before the church had its own premises. The first praesidium was named Our Lady of New Town to reflect Toa Payoh's early years, and later praesidiums comprised Mandarin- and Malayalam-speaking parishioners. Volunteers of the church also worked across denominational differences and often organised joint programmes with Toa Payoh Methodist Church in the 1970s.

View of the church's original sanctuary and altar, 1970s
Courtesy of Church of the Risen Christ

Church of the Risen Christ, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

TRADITIONS AND FESTIVALS

The Church of the Risen Christ has a longstanding tradition of celebrating the Feast of Our Lady of Velankanni, which originates from a 16th-century shrine to Mother Mary in Velankanni, Tamil Nadu in India. The feast draws Catholics from across Singapore and non-Catholics as well. Members of the Indian Catholic Movement based at the church help prepare the liturgy for the feast and serve as lectors (lay liturgical readers) at Tamil Masses among other activities.

In more recent decades, the church has included significant numbers of parishioners from Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines. Among other activities, the Filipino community at the church practises Simbang Gabi, a traditional nine-day Christmas devotional celebration including the recitation of the rosary in Tagalog.

Parishioners at the Feast of Our Lady of Velankanni celebration, 2022
Courtesy of Church of the Risen Christ

Rosary procession at the church, 2000s
Courtesy of Church of the Risen Christ

TOA PAYOH METHODIST CHURCH

480 Lorong 2 Toa Payoh

In 1968, Wesley Methodist Church and St. Andrew's Cathedral started a Methodist outreach and evangelical mission in Toa Payoh town. The mission was housed in a rented shop at Block 109, Lorong 1, which was used as a kindergarten in the day and a free clinic in the evenings. The congregation that would grow into Toa Payoh Methodist Church held its first religious service at the shop in 1969, before moving to another shop at Block 4 on Lorong 7.

With the appointment of full-time pastor Reverend Michael Wong in 1970, the focus turned to establishing the church in a permanent location in Toa Payoh. Reverend Nga Tieng Chieng, the founding pastor of Faith Methodist Church, led fundraising efforts to build a church at Lorong 2, including taking a personal loan. On 1 September 1973, the new church building costing around S$1 million was officially opened, with space for a congregation of 1,200.

In its early years, Toa Payoh Methodist Church collaborated with a Catholic church, Church of the Risen Christ, to start tuition classes for the town's underprivileged children. Both churches also worked together to train volunteers for a non-religious counselling service.

The church was redeveloped in 2010, and the compound also houses Toa Payoh Chinese Methodist Church today.

Toa Payoh Methodist Church, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

UNITED FIVE TEMPLES OF TOA PAYOH (伍合庙)

177 Lorong 7 Toa Payoh

United Five Temples of Toa Payoh (also known as Wu He Miao) was completed in 1974 to house five different temples founded during Toa Payoh's kampong past. It was the first institution in Singapore to bring together temples founded by and catering to the Hokkien, Hainanese, Teochew and Cantonese communities, and enshrining different deities from five temples within one compound.

In the 1960s, the five temples learnt that their land would be acquired by the government to make way for the redevelopment of Toa Payoh town. Due to the prohibitive costs of purchasing land and building new temples, the five temples decided to pool the contributions of their devotees and build a temple uniting all of them. The plan was supported by the former Member of Parliament for Toa Payoh constituency Eric Cheong, and by 1970, $200,000 was raised to purchase land along Lorong 7.

As the temple brought together deities from the various dialect groups, this marked a shift among the local Chinese community which used to distinguish socio-economic activities by dialect groups. It paved the way for another 68 united or combined temples to be established in Singapore between the 1970s and 2012 and originally housed the following five temples.

United Five Temples of Toa Payoh, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Lanterns recording the names of donors of Chee Tian Keng Temple, one of the temples in United Five Temples of Toa Payoh, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Chee Tian Keng Temple (聚天宮)

Chee Tian Keng Temple was founded in the early 1900s by the Hokkiens and Teochews, with Tua Pek Kong (also known as Da Bo Gong, the Taoist deity of prosperity) as its main deity. The temple was originally named Puay Teng Keng and was located along Boon Teck Road in a kampong of the same name.

The name Puay Teng Keng ("Flying (from) Above Temple" in Hokkien) was inspired by a local tale about how Tua Pek Kong flew to the area and landed at the site where temple was eventually built. To ensure that the deity remained in place, the elders of the village renamed the temple Chee Tian Keng, with the Hokkien word *chee* meaning "to gather".

Fuk Tuck Chee Association Temple (山竹园福德祠)

Fuk Tuck Chee Association Temple was founded in the early 1940s by the Cantonese community and was also originally located on Boon Teck Road. It is dedicated to Tu Di Gong (the Earth God in Taoism) and his wife Tu Di Po.

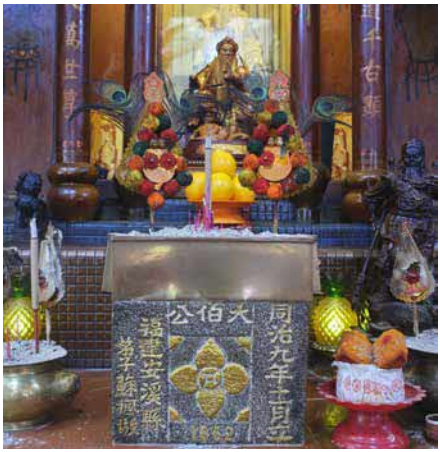
It is said that the temple's origins lie in a pair of statues of Tu Di Gong and his wife Tu Di Po, which were once housed within the residence

Celebration at Chee Tian Keng Temple, 1980s
Courtesy of Chee Tian Keng Temple

of a wealthy family near Toa Payoh Rise. The statues were later found under a tree and moved to a residence at Tai Gin Road, becoming a popular focus of worship for Cantonese in the area.

Tong Heng Kang Ah Hood Road Kampong Sin Huay Temple (通兴港亚佛路甘榜神会)

Founded in 1864 in a kampong along Ah Hood Road, Tong Heng Kang Ah Hood Road Kampong Sin Huay Temple enshrines the Taoist deities Gan Tian Da Di and Tua Pek Kong. Built by the Teochew community, the temple is named after its roots in Ah Hood Road kampong as well as the association that manages it.



Stone incense burner on Tong Heng Kang Ah Hood Road Kampong Sin Huay Temple's shrine dedicated to Tua Pek Kong and inscribed in 1870, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Chow Eng Chee of Toa Payoh Temple (昭应祠)

Founded in 1940 by the Hainanese community, this temple's main deities are the 108 Brothers and it was originally located on Jalan Rajah. The 108 Brothers were said to be a group of Hainanese migrants who were killed by pirates during the early 19th century, and later deified as guardian divinities of the sea.

Wu Ji Gong (无极宫)

This temple's founding date and founders are unknown, and it has since moved out of the united temple.

MASJID MUHAJIRIN

275 Braddell Road

Opened on 8 April 1977, Masjid Muhajirin is the first mosque in Singapore to have been supported with contributions from the Mosque Building Fund (MBF, today Mosque Building and Mendaki Fund (MBMF)), alongside more traditional means of fundraising from the community.

The mosque derives its name from the Muhajirun ("emigrant" in Arabic), a group of early Muslims who followed the prophet Muhammad on the *hijrah*, his journey from Mecca to Medina in the seventh century.

In the 1960s, Muslim residents of the new satellite town set up the Persatuan Kebajikan Muslim Toa Payoh (Muslim Benevolent Society of Toa Payoh) to provide assistance to disadvantaged families. As the Muslim population in the area grew and existing mosques in the vicinity of Toa Payoh were redeveloped for other purposes, the need for a new mosque became evident.

The Toa Payoh Mosque Building Committee was formed in 1971, and over the next seven years, raised half of the S$900,000 required for the construction of a new mosque. Many of the fundraising efforts were in the time-honoured kampong tradition of house-to-house collections and food sales, with hawkers pledging daily revenues, and individuals promising to contribute at least five percent of their monthly salaries.

Former Toa Payoh resident Mohamed bin Sheik Jaafar (b. 1950) was among the volunteers who collected door-to-door donations. He recalled:

"My father was part of the mosque's building committee, and I helped to collect donations when I was a young man. For Muslims, the mosque is an important place in a religious sense as well as

Masjid Muhajirin, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

View of the original mosque from across Braddell Road, 1970s
Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Double-tiered roof of the minaret which features ochre tiles, a hallmark of Malay architecture, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Entrance of the mosque combining several forms of Islamic architecture, including a rectangular frame, archways and a façade of geometric motifs with stylised floral patterns that recall traditional jali *screens in Mughal architecture, 2022*
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

for community, and naturally, I felt proud to have played a part in its fundraising."

He also remembered working alongside a few hundred Muslim volunteers from the community to help clear the site for the mosque in 1972.

As land and construction costs had risen since Singapore's independence in 1965, community leaders saw a need for a new approach to complement traditional fundraising efforts. In 1974, leaders from the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) met with then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, then-Minister for Social Affairs Othman Wok, and Malay-Muslim Members of Parliament. Prime Minister Lee suggested the creation of a fund derived from the monthly Central Provident Fund contributions of workers and directing these funds towards mosque building.

MBF was thus set up in September 1975, with 50 cents from the wages of each Muslim worker per month at the time going towards the fund. Individuals could choose to opt out of the scheme, but very few did so. In fact, many contributed more than 50 cents each month. The impact of MBF was significant – between 1977 and 1981, the fund assisted in the construction of six new mosques, including Masjid Muhajirin, across Singapore.

The construction of Masjid Muhajirin began on 19 October 1975 on a plot of land formerly occupied by a rattan factory off Braddell Road. On 8 April 1977, the mosque was opened by then-Minister for Social Affairs Othman Wok. The original mosque featured a prominent onion-shaped dome of the Persian-Indian architectural style atop its minaret and bore influences from traditional Minangkabau design.

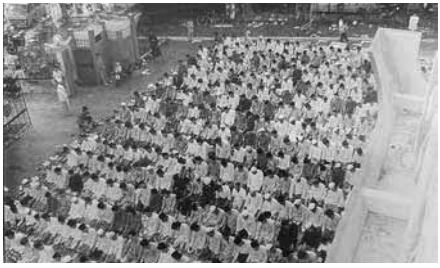
In 2009, Masjid Muhajirin was rebuilt as part of the Singapore Islamic Hub development. Today, the mosque shares its grounds with Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS, also known as the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore) as well as Madrasah Irsyad Zuhri Al Islamiah.

TRADITIONS AND FESTIVALS

Like other mosques through the world, Masjid Muhajirin is a hive of activity during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Ramadan commemorates the first revelation of Prophet Mohammed, and is a time of fasting, prayer, personal reflection and coming together for the Muslim community.

Activities held at Masjid Muhairin during Ramadan include *terawih* ("nightly prayers" in Malay) during which families and groups may spend most of the night at the mosque, and the distribution of *bubur* (porridge) to break the daily fasts.

Since the 1970s, Masjid Muhajirin has made it a practice to distribute *bubur Ramadan* and other food to residents of all communities and religious backgrounds in HDB blocks around the mosque. In the early years of the mosque, its staff and community volunteers would come together to cook the *bubur Ramadan*. The mosque also hosts *iftar* (evening meals for breaking the daily fast), which are attended by people from diverse backgrounds and religions.



Congregation during Aidilfitri (festival marking the end of Ramadan) prayers, c. 1980s
Courtesy of Masjid Muhajirin

Bubur *(porridge) distribution during Ramadan, c. 1980s*
Courtesy of Masjid Muhajirin

CHUNG HWA MEDICAL INSTITUTION

640 Lorong 4 Toa Payoh

Chung Hwa Medical Institution traces its roots to Chung Hwa Free Clinic, which was opened in 1952. Established by the Singapore Chinese Medical Society (today the Singapore Chinese Physicians Association (SCPA)), the clinic provided free Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) treatments in post-World War II Singapore. At its Toa Payoh location, the institution serves patients from a wide range of communities and backgrounds.

Originally housed within Chung Shan Wui Koon, a clan association on Chin Chew Street, Chung Hwa Free Clinic relocated to its own premises on Telok Ayer Street in 1956. Following government redevelopment plans

Chung Hwa Free Clinic at Telok Ayer Street, c. 1950s
Courtesy of Chung Hwa Medical Institution

Consultation in Chung Hwa Free Clinic at Telok Ayer Street, c. 1950s
Courtesy of Chung Hwa Medical Institution

Waiting room of Chung Hwa Medical Institution, 1995
Courtesy of Chung Hwa Medical Institution

for their branch clinics on Upper Serangoon Road and in Geylang, SCPA started an initiative to open a medical institution in Toa Payoh. This was supported by contributions from different segments of the community, including taxi drivers, hawkers, trishaw riders and business leaders, and more than S$5 million was raised over three years.

Opened on 28 October 1978, Chung Hwa Medical Institution attracted more than 400 patients from various ethnic groups on its first day, and provided them with free medicine and herbs in exchange for a token consultation fee. The medical institution continues to provide low-cost TCM medical treatments to the general public today as well as subsidised or free healthcare for the under-privileged.

After the institution was established in Toa Payoh, it was able to widen its medical operations and conduct research in more TCM treatments such as acupuncture. In recent decades, the institution has developed treatments for various diseases and medical conditions, including cancer, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes.

The institution also houses the headquarters of SCPA, Singapore College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, two TCM research institutes (i.e. Chinese Medical and Drugs Research Institute and Chinese Acupuncture Research Institution) as well as a museum and a herb garden.

Chung Hwa Medical Institution, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

SRI VAIRAVIMADA KALIAMMAN TEMPLE

2001 Lorong 8 Toa Payoh

Established in the 1860s, Sri Vairavimada Kaliamman Temple has its roots in a *choultree* (rest area) in the Orchard area. The *choultree* drew plantation workers and laundry workers, eventually evolving into a place where Hindus could pray and sing devotional songs to the goddess Kaliamman.

A temple was eventually built near the junction of Killiney Road and Orchard Road to replace the *choultree*. It was known as the Kaliamman *kovil* (temple) in the early 20th century and was vested with the Mohammedan and Hindu Endowment Board (MHEB, today the Hindu Endowments Board (HEB)) in 1909.

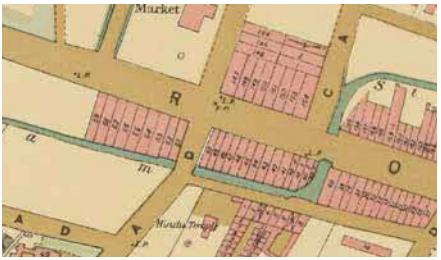
In 1921, the colonial authorities acquired the land that the temple stood on to build a railway between Tank Road and Woodlands. Funds for a new temple were raised by the Hindu community and a plot of land at 21 Somerset

Road spanning 10,126 square feet was purchased at 80 cents per square foot. After the temple was built, it remained at Somerset Road until 1970, when the construction of the Somerset Mass Rapid Transit station necessitated another move.

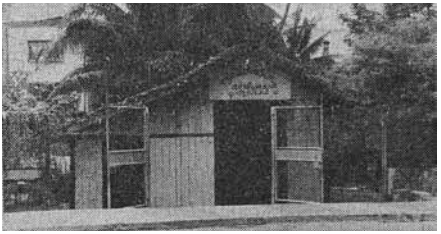
The temple then relocated to its present site at Toa Payoh in 1982 which had been acquired by HEB. The wedding hall was the first part of the temple to be built and temporarily hosted the temple's deities during the move to Toa Payoh. Construction of the temple took three years and the consecration ceremony was held on 27 March 1986.

The temple's main sanctum enshrines the deity Kaliamman, alongside other sanctums dedicated to the deities Vinayagar, Murugan, Ayyappan, Guruvayurappan, Durgai Amman, Periachi Amman, Angala Parameswari and Madurai Veeran among others. It employs Brahmin priests and Pandarams (non-Brahmin priests traditionally found in Amman temples), organises festivals and carries out *pooja* (worship rituals, also spelt *puja*), according to the Hindu Agamas (scriptures).

At its Toa Payoh location, the temple became the first institution in Singapore to offer kindergarten classes conducted in Tamil and English, as HEB had noted the lack of kindergartens offering Tamil as a second language. Its Saraswathy kindergarten proved to be such a success that it moved out of the temple to its own premises in Kim Keat in 1997. Saraswathy kindergarten eventually closed in 2018 as more kindergartens had started offering Tamil as a subject.



Map showing Kaliamman kovil *(temple, marked here as "Hindu Temple") near the junction of Killiney Road and Orchard Road, c. 1893*
Courtesy of Benedict Hon Sui Sen



Sri Vairavimada Kaliamman Temple at Somerset Road, undated
Courtesy of Sri Vairavimada Kaliamman Temple

Sri Vairavimada Kaliamman Temple, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

TRADITIONS AND FESTIVALS

Temple devotees carry out a few traditional practices at the Guruvayurappan sanctum, including the feeding of a child's first meal and the writing of a child's first letters in rice grains. The sanctum also includes a *thulambaram*, a scale upon which a child or adult is weighed against offerings of ghee, milk, dhal, sugar and/or other items to express the devotee's aspirations for a good future.

Celebrants from different communities and religions take part in a Santhana Kudam procession at the temple on National Day each year. The procession involves Santhana Kudam pots filled with sandalwood paste, where participants can witness the paste being used in the ablution of the deity Kaliamman.

The temple also celebrates various Hindu festivals, such as Navakshri Homam, which is celebrated in either the Tamil calendar month of Maasi (February to March) or Panguni (March to April). This festival honours the Hindu goddess Kaliammam, with *homam* (fire sacrifice) rituals conducted for the nine forms of the mother goddess. *Utsavars* (processional deities), borne on chariots, are also conveyed to other temples and neighbourhoods, while *varisais* (traditional temple offerings honouring the main deity) are brought from other Hindu temples in Singapore.

Another major festival celebrated at the temple is Brahmotsavam, which is dedicated to the temple's main deity Kaliamman and involves a symbolic cleansing or renovation of the temple. Conducted in conjunction with the full moon during the Tamil month of Chithirai (April to May), the festival begins with a *kodiyettram* (flag hoisting) in the main sanctum, followed by nine days of prayers.

On the ninth day of the festival, the temple organises a chariot procession that travels through Toa Payoh and other areas, followed

Priests performing a homam *(fire sacrifice) ritual during Navakshri Homam, undated*
Courtesy of Sri Vairavimada Kaliamman Temple

Priests preparing a silver chariot to carry the deity statue ahead of a procession during Brahmotsavam, undated
Courtesy of Sri Vairavimada Kaliamman Temple

Makara Vilakku celebrated with a ceremonial 18-step stairway leading to the statue of Ayyappan that symbolises the pilgrims' climb to Sabarimala Temple in Kerala, India, undated
Courtesy of Sri Vairavimada Kaliamman Temple

by the lowering of the festival flag and Theerthavari, a ceremony featuring the immersion of the festival deity in sanctified water. The end of the festival is marked by Oonjal Vizha, a ritual where the deity is placed on a swing to bestow blessings on devotees.

In more recent decades, Makara Vilakku, a festival for Swamy Ayyappan closely associated with the Malayalee community in Singapore and increasingly drawing devotees from other Indian communities, has grown into an important festival at the temple.

The first Makara Vilakku celebrated at the temple was in 1990, following the installation of a sanctum enshrining Swamy Ayyappan in 1986. Devotees also offer *pooja* here before embarking on a pilgrimage to Sabarimala Temple in Kerala, India, marking the start of a 41-day period of prayers, meditation and celibacy.

SINGAPORE FEDERATION OF CHINESE CLAN ASSOCIATIONS

397 Lorong 2 Toa Payoh

Inaugurated in 1986 as an umbrella body for Chinese clan associations, Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations (SFCCA) was founded by the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan, Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan, Singapore Kwang Tung Association, Singapore Foochow Association, Nanyang Khek Community Guild, Singapore Hainan Hwee Kuan and Sam Kiang Huay Kuan. It later grew to include more than 200 member associations.

In 1997, SFCCA relocated its headquarters to its Toa Payoh premises, which was formerly occupied by the Heng A Khe Bong School. Through research, publications, exhibitions, events, education programmes and other activities, SFCCA promotes Singaporean Chinese heritage, culture and traditions. SFCCA also fosters cooperation between clan associations, as well as between clan associations and other groups in Singapore. It provides various scholarships and bursaries to underprivileged students and inmates, as well as funding for community initiatives.

At its Toa Payoh headquarters, SFCCA also houses a heritage gallery that showcases the history of diverse groups within Singapore's Chinese community and Chinese clan associations, as well as local Chinese cultural practices and festivals.

Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

TOA PAYOH TOWN

HDB official during earth-moving operations in a Toa Payoh kampong, 1963
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

The development of Toa Payoh town and the transition from kampong to public housing were at the heart of a pivotal, transformative period. For the residents of Toa Payoh, the period brought about significant upheaval and necessitated their adaption to life in a pioneering Housing & Development Board (HDB) town.

PAVING THE WAY FOR A NEW TOWN

From the late 1940s, Singapore experienced a population boom and was faced with a serious housing shortage as residential areas within the city quickly became overcrowded. By 1953, the residential population of the Central Area was estimated at 340,000 people, cramming some 30 percent of the island's population into two percent of its land area.

In an attempt to meet the demand for housing, the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) began constructing new housing estates and developing new towns in the 1950s. SIT purchased about 607 acres of land in Toa Payoh between 1951 and 1954, including parts of Kampong Boon Teck, Kampong Kim Keat and Kampong Potong Pasir, for an estimated S$7 million. This land was initially earmarked for the construction of a small public housing estate and light industry, with most of the area to be kept for farming.

In 1955, Singapore's first urban planning Master Plan drawn up by SIT addressed the housing crisis. The document highlighted the overcrowding in the city and pointed out that a considerable number of residential buildings were "so dilapidated that they must be replaced". These buildings were estimated to house nearly 40 percent of the population and were mainly made up of residences in urban kampongs, including Toa Payoh.

With the housing crisis growing more acute, the Master Plan proposed the resettlement of 170,000 people, or half the Central Area's population, to other areas. The plan also estimated that some 1,050,000 people would require permanent homes between 1953 and 1972, which meant that 11,000 housing units would need to be constructed every year. From 1947 to 1959, however, SIT was only able to build 20,907 units.

TEMPLE ESTATE

Completed in May 1954, Temple Estate was built by SIT and bounded by Toa Payoh East, Lorong 6 and Jalan Toa Payoh. Comprising 54 two-room, 360 three-room and 54 four-room flats, as well as 10 shophouses built in 1933, the estate was well equipped with amenities, including a market located near the junction of Kim Keat Road and Kim Keat Avenue.

Residents described the estate as having many open spaces, with a semi-circular block housing a community centre that served as a social hub. The estate also included the 10,000th flat built by SIT, a milestone that was commemorated with a plaque.

In 1983, 478 families living in the estate were informed of redevelopment plans by the Housing & Development Board (HDB), and the estate was cleared in 1988. Many of the residents were resettled in the HDB estate of Potong Pasir. Syed Ibrahim bin Syed Mohamed (b. 1942), who lived in the estate as a child, recalled:

"It was like a longhouse without stilts ... divided into family cubicles [and each] had one hall, one room and a kitchen. In front of us were uncemented drains and the Whampoa [River], which often swelled after a heavy rain."

10,000th unit in Temple Estate, 1954
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Apartment block in Temple Estate next to kampong houses, 1954
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

TWILIGHT OF THE KAMPONGS

On 1 February 1960, the People's Action Party (PAP) government dissolved the Singapore Improvement Trust and replaced it with the Housing & Development Board (HDB). At this point, Singapore's population was at 1.6 million and growing at an annual rate of 4.6 percent. Providing affordable housing was a key component of PAP's political agenda, and the success of the public housing scheme became inextricably linked to the new government's legitimacy.

To solve the serious housing shortage then, HDB embarked on a five-year Building Programme that centred on the construction of as many housing units as possible, in particular to provide housing for low-income groups. It formed part of a short-term plan, which focused on building "new centres of population in the form of properly planned housing estates which would be within easy means of communication to the city".

By 1961, HDB completed a census for an initial development area for Toa Payoh and

Allocation of housing at Kim Keat Road to resettle Toa Payoh villagers, 1963
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Vacated kampong houses in Toa Payoh, 1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

envisaged a building scheme covering 600 acres and consisting of 30,000 housing units. However, HDB noted in its 1961 annual report that "due to difficulties in clearance as a result of organised resistance, it [had] not yet been possible to commence development work". This followed the pattern of earlier, unsuccessful efforts to resettle Toa Payoh's urban kampong residents, where eviction notices were ignored and groups were organised to oppose the resettlement.

Issues related to resettling kampong residents and clearing the kampongs of Toa Payoh began surfacing in the newspapers in 1961, with reports noting that some 2,000 to 3,000 families had to be resettled before clearance could begin. While different options for resettlement were offered by the government, some residents were unsatisfied with the compensation rates offered for their residential and/or agricultural land, as well as the rehousing options. Others who wanted to continue with their agricultural activities felt that the resettlement sites offered were too far from the city.

Perhaps as importantly, residents cherished the freedom afforded by the kampong environment to manage their land and breed their livestock. They also feared that the proposed flats would be out of their financial reach, and that the shift in lifestyles would necessitate major economic and social changes. Summing up their apprehensions over these changes, former kampong resident Ng Giak Hai (b. 1949) recalled:

"At the time [our incomes] and the standard of living was very low. When they wanted to relocate us, everyone thought: 'We're in trouble this time.' We didn't know what to do. Most people didn't have money to buy a flat, they could only rent a very small flat for $20 a month."

Earth-moving operations with HDB officials and onlooking villagers in a Toa Payoh kampong, 1963
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Then-Minister for National Development Lim Kim San on a tour of Toa Payoh, 1964
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

The kampong residents who sought higher monetary compensation and alternative resettlement sites were supported by the Singapore Country Peoples' Association (SCPA) and the Singapore Rural Residents' Association (SRRA). The involvement of these associations, which were regarded as aligned with the Barisan Sosialis party, meant that politics had a significant influence on resettlement issues in Toa Payoh.

These associations, which were active across the island and particularly influential in rural areas, took advantage of the concerns of the kampong residents to canvass resistance against the clearance of the villages and development of Toa Payoh. Both SCPA and SRRA provided legal advice to residents, organised protests and sit-ins, urged villagers to act as a collective front, and penned letters to the authorities calling for raised compensation rates.

Quah Wee Ho (b. 1935), a grassroots leader in the 1950s and 1960s, recalled that many residents also expressed a wish to remain in Toa Payoh, even if they had to be resettled:

"During the first phase of kampong clearance, there were about 60 families to be moved. When the bulldozers got there, there were more than a hundred old ladies, old people, women and children huddled together blocking the bulldozers, not letting them move. That [protest] was organised by the associations [SCPA and SRRA].

"We then called HDB's chairman Lim Kim San and chief architect Teh Cheang Wan, and the two of them came down to talk to the villagers. They heard the villagers' requests, promised them that they would try to resolve the issues and that work on the site would stop for the time being. ... The villagers did not want to move to other areas, they wanted to be resettled in the vicinity."

In 1963, SPCA and SRRA were deregistered. This followed the issuance of a statement by

Then-Parliamentary Secretary Chan Chee Seng (centre) speaking to a resident of a Toa Payoh kampong, 1967
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Then-Parliamentary Secretary Chan Chee Seng (centre) speaking to residents of a Toa Payoh kampong, 1967
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

the government, which held SCPA and SRRA responsible for acts of sabotage and physical violence in Toa Payoh. The statement labeled them as "political organisations for agitation on behalf of the Communists and [operating] as recruiting and training centres for the Communist cadres in the rural areas".

In the same year, HDB increased compensation terms and offered additional options for relocation in October and by 1965, it was able to conclude resettlement agreements with most of Toa Payoh's kampong residents.

BUILDING A NEW TOWN – SINGAPORE STYLE

As the first town to be planned and built by HDB, Toa Payoh was also Singapore's first town planned with a target population of between 180,000 and 250,000. The town was constructed based on the New Town Structural Model, which involved several neighbourhoods surrounding a town centre equipped with amenities and community facilities.

HDB's first town planner Alan Choe (b. 1931), who was tasked with planning Toa Payoh's layout, heeded the call with much trepidation. He found Toa Payoh to be barren and remote, and described the process as such:

"I liked the [Toa Payoh Seu Teck Sean Tong]. I used the temple as the focus – the roads would start from there, and from there I set the pattern [of the town]. ... I was tinkering with [planning for] about 100 persons per acre, but HDB told me no no no, you have to plan for 500 persons per acre. I nearly fell off my chair. I had never been trained to [plan a town] that dense.

"[But Mr Lim Kim San, Chairman of HDB and Mr Howe Yoon Chong, CEO of HDB] were inspirational [leaders], and that got me going. The message was drummed into me that there is a bigger meaning behind [public] housing. There was an important decision to eradicate the poor housing conditions ... the consolation to me was: although my training told me that [a densely populated town was] tantamount to a slum, having seen the slums [in 1960s Singapore] when I walked around, [Toa Payoh would be] many, many times better. That gave the inspiration to do my best, and that's how we did Toa Payoh New Town. [After we did the town], we became suddenly, world leaders in public housing."

Samsui women working at a construction site in Toa Payoh, 1962
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Construction workers working on a sewerage project in Toa Payoh, 1964
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Then-Minister for National Development Lim Kim San (centre) at a press conference about Toa Payoh town, 1964
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Toa Payoh Seu Teck Sean Tong (foreground) with newly-completed HDB flats around it, 1966
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

HDB blocks along Lorong 5 and Lorong 6 under construction, 1966
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

Neighbourhood centre in Toa Payoh with blocks of flats, a market, shops and a playground, 1967
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Pedestrian mall between Toa Payoh Public Library and shophouses, 1974
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

The area around Lorong 5 was the first part of the new Toa Payoh to be developed, with Block 68 housing the first market to be completed in the new town. While Block 52 is regarded as the first block in Toa Payoh to have been completed, several blocks around it were also completed within a similar time frame.

The density of Toa Payoh's neighbourhoods also allowed planners to cater for a multitude of public spaces and amenities within the town, including open spaces, parks, places for recreation and a town centre. The town centre, spanning 16 hectares, consisted of a pedestrian mall as well as amenities including schools, theatres, a library, clinics and community institutions.

During its first five-year building programme (1960-1964), HDB had assessed its flat rental rates according to affordability for low-income families and whether subsidies would be needed, before eventually setting rents at S$20 for a one-room flat, S$40 for two-room and S$60 for three-room. The first one-room "improved" flats in Toa Payoh, each measuring 340 square feet, had a higher rental rate of S$30 per month, as they were of a larger floor size and the "improved" design allowed for partitions.

Poster titled "Home Ownership for the People", 1966
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of the National Heritage Board. Used with permission from the Ministry of Communications and Information

Lion dance performers at a HDB balloting ceremony for the sale of Toa Payoh flats, 1966
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

In January 1966, the government announced that Toa Payoh flats would be sold under the Home Ownership Scheme. The first batch of 8,000 flats sold were of the two-room and three-room types and considered to be "improved" from earlier HDB designs, as they were approximately 120 square feet larger than similar flats in Queenstown and MacPherson. The larger sizes carried higher prices of S$6,000 for the two-room flats and S$7,500 for three-room flats. In June that year, tenants began moving into four blocks of one-room flats on a rental basis, and by the end of the year, some 5,640 flats and shops had been completed.

By 1969, there were 18,834 flats completed in Toa Payoh, and some 10 hectares of land had been sold for light industry. The following year, the town spanned 245 hectares and had a population of 120,000, and six years on, Toa Payoh had 36,300 flats and a population of 190,000. The development of Toa Payoh town was almost complete by the late 1970s, marking a pivotal period in Singapore's public housing history.

Flat buyers at a HDB balloting ceremony in Toa Payoh, 1966
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Void decks, landings and common corridors in HDB blocks were popular play spaces for children, 1971
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

SETTLING IN A NEW HDB TOWN

Residents who moved into Toa Payoh flats from 1966 were not just among the earliest to live in a HDB town; they were also going through a transformative time that would touch almost every aspect of their lives, from employment and education to lifestyles and social networks. Relationships within and between communities began to change as people from a diverse range of backgrounds and cultures became neighbours.

For those relocating from kampongs to flats, the move was a leap into the unknown. The supply of electricity and water, as well as sanitary conditions, were better in the flats, and the threat of fires and floods gutting entire villages were reduced. However, new flat residents felt constrained and cut off from the flexible and familiar friendships of the kampong environment they had known all their lives.

Long established kinship and community ties, which were often influential in kampong life, were disrupted by people moving to different parts of Singapore. Even small details of daily life imposed stresses on former kampong residents, from initial fears of being stuck in a lift to the unsettling feeling of being cast into a strange new environment.

Moving into a pioneering HDB town also intersected with other parts of their lives, bringing about transitions into formal employment, increasing education and economic opportunities as well as broadening social and cultural horizons. The memories of early Toa Payoh residents tell not only their own stories, but also a multitudinous narrative of post-independence Singapore.

Medic Keith Beins (b. 1964), who moved to Block 96 from Jalan Bahagia in 1969, remembered childhood experiences in Toa Payoh:

"Everyday there would be the smells from the shophouses at our block – coffee being roasted, otah *[spiced fish cake] being grilled. The doors of each flat were never closed and the kids would be playing in each other's houses, along the corridors or at the playground, at least until the mothers started shouting for them to come home.*

Playground in Toa Payoh, 1972
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

Housing estate around Lorong 1 market, c. 1960s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of the National Heritage Board

"At the playground or at the football field, nobody would be left alone. Even if you didn't know anybody, you would be called to join the kids playing football or catching tadpoles after the rain. After football, we would send somebody to go to a Malay family's home and buy air batu *– frozen tubes of ice with flavourings such as lemon or* sng buay *[preserved plum]. Or we would buy syrup-flavoured ice balls from the Indian seller."*

Accountant Noraizah Jani (b. 1969) recounted her memories of the town:

"I moved to Toa Payoh in 1967, when it still had the reputation of being a gangster town. There was some hesitancy on my great grandmother's part to move from MacKenzie Road, but we've never looked back. Since then, I've lived in Toa Payoh Lorong 5 and Lorong 4. When people ask me which kampong I grew up in, I say my kampong is Toa Payoh.

"With Toa Payoh, it's all the simple pleasures – visiting the many textile shops in Toa Payoh Central with my mother, the library and the kiddy rides in front of the fountain there, Sunday morning breakfasts of the famous mee rebus at Lorong 7.

"My family used to visit Toa Payoh Park often as well, and I would climb the Look-Out Tower, get halfway up before being told by my parents not to go too high. There were also the expos, fairs and pasar malams *(night markets) where pineapple drinks and rojak were treats, boxing matches that my parents weren't too keen on but we still watched."*

Fountain and Toa Payoh Public Library at Toa Payoh Central, 1974
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

SCHOOLS IN TOA PAYOH

The development of Toa Payoh town from 1966 and the growth of the town's population saw demand for school places rise in the late 1960s and 1970s. Among the schools established during this period were First Toa Payoh Primary and Secondary School, in 1968 and 1969 respectively.

A number of schools also relocated to Toa Payoh from the 1960s to the 2000s. These included Poi Ching School, a Chinese-medium institution founded in 1919 at Victoria Street, which operated in Toa Payoh from 1970 to 2000 before moving to Tampines. Kheng Cheng School, established by Madam Lim Peng Tuan in 1922 in the Moulmein area, also moved to Toa Payoh in 1972.

One of the most storied schools in Singapore, the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) moved to Toa Payoh in 1984, after more than a century at its original location in Bras Basah since 1854. Today, CHIJ operates primary and secondary schools at its Lorong 1 location, as well as CHIJ Museum. Other schools that relocated to Toa Payoh include Beatty Secondary School in 1982 and Pei Chun Public School in 2001.

Toa Payoh is also home to two madrasahs – Madrasah Irsyad Zuhri Al-Islamiah at Singapore Islamic Hub, and Madrasah Al-Arabiah Al-Islamiah at Lorong 6. The former was founded in 1947 as Mahadul Irsyad at the former Kampong Quarry at Hindhede Road. It was then located at Woodlands Road and later Winstedt Road, before moving to Toa Payoh in 2009.

Madrasah Al-Arabiah was established in the 1930s next to Masjid Haji Yusoff at Hillside Drive and operated at various locations before moving to the former Poi Ching School site in 2009. In 2020, it opened its permanent campus, where it continues to offer a curriculum of Islamic education together with a strong focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects.

Madrasah Al-Arabiah Al-Islamiah, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus Primary and Secondary School in Toa Payoh, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

INDUSTRIES IN TOA PAYOH

Apart from apartment blocks, schools and community spaces, industrial estates and factory sites were also established within Toa Payoh town, which provided employment opportunities for a significant proportion of the town's population. This also afforded workers employment closer to their homes and encouraged the growth of centres of work away from the city.

While diverse cottage industries existed since Toa Payoh's kampong past (see page 19), they operated on a smaller scale and mainly served nearby residents and the local market. Singapore's industrialisation after independence in 1965, however, saw the growth of the electronics industry, with multinational companies attracted by pro-business policies to set up their factories in Singapore. Toa Payoh was one of the sites of the first electronic companies, including Societa General Semiconduttori (SGS, now part of STMicroelectronics) and Fairchild Semiconductor.

Fairchild's factory at Lorong 3 was established in 1969 and its workforce of over 1,000 employees, which included a number of homemakers, produced more than a million integrated circuits each week. The company operated on three shifts around the clock, with most of the homemakers working the 11pm – 7am shift before visiting the markets of Toa Payoh to buy groceries and daily necessities.

FORMER SIONG HOE BISCUIT FACTORY

Established in 1952, Siong Hoe Biscuit Factory was located on what was previously Ah Hood Road. The S$1 million factory was touted as utilising state-of-the-art automation to mechanise the production of biscuits. The factory even had its own electricity generator. At its peak, the factory produced 4,000 six-kati tins of crackers and biscuits, comprising 20 different types on a daily basis.

In 1963, the owners shut the factory down after a series of unsuccessful negotiations for the retrenchment pay of a few workers and a three-month strike. The site was closed in the 1990s and is now occupied by the condominium Trellis Towers.

Cream crackers tin produced by Siong Hoe Biscuit Factory, 1970s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Fairchild Singapore Private Limited in Toa Payoh, 1975
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Workers at the Fairchild factory, 1975
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

From the late 1970s and 1980s, Singapore's focus shifted to more capital-intensive industries with greater emphasis on the use of technology, such as the manufacture of computer peripherals. One example was the Aurora factory in Toa Payoh, which produced electric toy cars and employed 1,200 workers.

Another factory with a longstanding industrial presence in Toa Payoh belongs to the Dutch company Philips. Established in 1972, the Philips factory in Toa Payoh produced 8,000 television tuners per day for the global market and by the mid-1980s, it had become Philips' largest colour television manufacturing centre outside Europe. In addition to televisions, the factory also produced a wide range of home entertainment products, including radios, gramophones, cassette recorders, video recorders and audio systems.

Workers at Philips Singapore in Toa Payoh, 1994
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

WOMEN'S WORK: PIONEER WORKERS OF TOA PAYOH

As Singapore underwent rapid industrialisation in the 1960s, one of the engines of this transformation was a pioneer generation of young workers, many of whom were women.

The female labour force, favoured by employers for stereotypical qualities such as attention to detail and tenacity to endure long hours of monotonous work, powered the employment and output growth in the labour-intensive manufacturing sector in Singapore. Even though the working hours were long and salaries were often low, their jobs provided them with some measure of economic and social independence, while allowing them to discharge their family responsibilities.

Suppammal Peramal (b. 1940), who moved to Singapore from Batu Pahat in Malaysia in 1956, recalled her experience at the Fairchild factory in Toa Payoh:

"[Everybody at the factory including] the Chinese, the Malays, spoke in Malay, so I had no communication trouble. [My first pay] was low, $100 to $120. Then they were impressed with my work, and they increased my salary, such that [I began to earn] more than my husband [who worked three jobs including as a mason and gardener]. When they are impressed with your work, they will increase your salary. In the whole [department] line, I was the only one [to get] two increases [a year], because I did more units than the rest."

The possibility of employment closer to home also attracted women who had to take care of their households and contribute to the family's finances. However, for many female workers, the expectation that they perform joint domestic and formal work resulted in a number of issues.

Many chose the night shift at the factories so as to be able to still take care of their families during the day. The long hours of work and inadequate rest brought about problems such as sleep and health issues, family conflicts and impaired work performance. Some even took stimulant pills to enable them to work long hours.

Wu Mui Huay, who worked in a garment factory in Toa Payoh with a salary of $7.50 per day, remembered:

"As a working woman I'm in a difficult position in many ways. We must put several hours of overtime at least. My supervisor is not happy if I escape overtime work too often, but Kim Luk, my husband, is cross when I come home late from work. He has overtime sometimes too, but he complains at my overtime because he says that the spirit of a home is lacking when the wife is at work and the husband is forced to cook dinner at home."

While there were often inequalities in pay and advancement prospects between men and women at the factories during the 1960s and 1970s, women often found a sense of community at their workplaces. Vasunthara Devi Ramiah, who worked at Fairchild, recalled that she would cook chicken curry and *thosai* for her Chinese and Malay colleagues on overtime shifts, and they would pay her $2 as a token of appreciation, which helped to cover the cost of the ingredients.

Workers at the Fairchild factory in Toa Payoh as members of an industrial mission from China look on, 1975
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Workers at General Electric Television & Appliances Private Limited in Toa Payoh, 1971
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

EVERYDAY HERITAGE

As the first town designed and developed entirely by the Housing & Development Board (HDB), Toa Payoh provided a test bed for the different architecture styles and features of public housing as well as community amenities common in HDB towns today. From National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) supermarkets to Town Parks, this section explores some of the key landmarks in Toa Payoh that have reflected the needs and aspirations of residents over the decades.

BLOCK 53, THE "VIP BLOCK"

53 Lorong 5 Toa Payoh

Known as the "VIP block" that served as a showpiece for Singapore's public housing, Block 53, as well as the surrounding blocks, were among the first built in Toa Payoh town. Completed in 1967, it was the tallest HDB block in the estate then at 19 storeys high. When flats in this block were first sold that year, a three-room unit with a floor size of 650 square feet carried a price tag of S$7,500.

Block 53 features a unique Y-shaped design and a rooftop viewing gallery that is currently closed to the public. A prominent cylindrical water tank sits on its roof, which used to carry advertisements, including one for local television manufacturer Setron.

The block also offered a panoramic view of Toa Payoh town then and played host to many foreign and local dignitaries, which led it to be dubbed a "VIP block". Then-Australian Prime Minister John Gorton was the first to visit in April 1968, while other visitors included Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Anne and Prince Phillip of the United Kingdom, former Sri Lankan Prime Minister Bandaranaike Sirimavo and Singapore's second President Benjamin Sheares.

In the early 1960s, Singapore faced the twin pressures of a rising population and a housing crisis. During this period, HDB's focus was on

Block 53, The "VIP Block", 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Queen Elizabeth II with the former Chairman of HDB, Lee Hee Seng, at the rooftop viewing gallery of Block 53, 1972
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Motorcade of Queen Elizabeth II at the VIP arrival driveway of Block 53, 1972
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

building and supplying flats of mainly standard linear, slab-block designs quickly to meet the housing demand.

In the case of Toa Payoh, it was constructed under HDB's second five-year Building Programme and by this time, a sizable proportion of Singaporeans had been supplied with flats. As such, HDB architects were able to experiment with various block styles in Toa Payoh, creating unique designs such as the bat-shaped Block 116 at Lorong 2 as well as the monumental, curving Block 157 along Lorong 1.

Another noteworthy block was Block 79, which residents nicknamed the "longhouse". Built in the 1960s, it was one of Singapore's longest residential buildings then at 296 metres, before it was announced for the Selective En bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS) in 1997 and redeveloped into the five-block Central Horizon. Central Horizon, an award-winning development, was offered as a rehousing option for residents as part of SERS. Along with another redevelopment, The Peak @ Toa Payoh, they both showcase the evolution in HDB estate amenities, such as roof gardens, sky gardens and sky terraces.

Bat-shaped Block 116, 1969
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

Y-shaped Block 53 with Blocks 54 and 55 in the background, 1967
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

296-metre-long Block 79 before it was redeveloped into Central Horizon, 1970
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

Central Horizon, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

TOA PAYOH TOWN PARK

Lorong 6 Toa Payoh

Completed in the 1970s, Toa Payoh Town Park paved the way for the introduction of parks and other green spaces in subsequent public housing estates. The park includes a 25-metre-tall Look-Out Tower, as well as ponds and a series of stone bridges, gazebos, trellises and pavilions. The Look-Out Tower was accorded conservation status by the Urban Redevelopment Authority in 2009.

Originally known as Toa Payoh Town Garden before being renamed Toa Payoh Town Park in 2002, the park spans 4.8 hectares. Built at a time before green spaces became commonplace in housing estates, the Town Park's popularity prompted HDB to set aside sizeable plots of land within each new public housing estate to serve residents and the wider community.

The initial layout of the park included playgrounds (with the first iteration of the Toa Payoh dragon playgrounds among them, see page 64), bridges with hexagonal motifs and granite arches, a waterfall and a lily pool, as well as a tea kiosk. The main tree species introduced in the first phase of planting

Visitors on a bridge at the Town Park with the Look-Out Tower in the background, c. 1970s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Waterfall at the Town Park, c. 1970s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Toa Payoh Town Park, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

included Weeping Willow, Tembusu, Flame of the Forest, Angsana and Bamboo.

The park was also a popular choice for wedding photoshoots in the 1970s and 1980s. The Look-Out Tower, overlooking a pond surrounded by Weeping Willows, has been featured in thousands of wedding photographs and continues to hold a special place in the memories of families and parkgoers. Residents also used the park's amenities for various leisure activities.

In 1994, the park was refurbished with interlocking tile footpaths replacing the former brick tiles and a seating terrace was added. Part of the park was also demolished to make way for a temporary bus interchange in 1997. Despite all the changes, Toa Payoh Town Park retains its charm and continues to be a well-loved recreational space for individuals as well as families.

FORMER 1973 SEAP GAMES VILLAGE AND COMPETITION VENUES

Toa Payoh Central and Lorong 6 Toa Payoh

For the seventh Southeast Asian Peninsular Games (SEAP Games, now known as the Southeast Asian Games), Toa Payoh town provided venues for competition and training, and was host to the 1973 SEAP Games Village (now Toa Payoh Central).

The SEAP Games, held from 1 September to 8 September 1973, was the first major international sporting competition to be held in Singapore, and involved athletes from Singapore, Malaysia, Khmer Republic (now Cambodia), South Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Burma (now Myanmar).

The SEAP Games secretariat was based at the Toa Payoh Public Library building and accommodated the Games Village staff of

View of the fountain that previously stood in front of Toa Payoh Public Library building (centre) that housed the secretariat for the 1973 SEAP Games, 1970s
Courtesy of National Library Board

Former 1973 SEAP Games Village, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

View of the stadium, swimming complex and sports hall, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Then-Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee (in white) at the reception marking the opening of the SEAP Games at the Games Village, 1973
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

80 military officers and personnel from the National Sports Promotion Board (now Sport Singapore). The village also included a medical centre, a dining hall that accommodated 1,800 people as well as entertainment and recreational amenities.

While the games villages of most international meets are secluded from local population centres, Toa Payoh Games Village embedded visiting athletes and officials from seven different countries in the heart of Toa Payoh town, and encouraged them to socialise with the locals while providing an authentic Singaporean experience.

The athletes' residences were located in proximity to sporting and other facilities, while the surrounding amenities included two cinemas, an emporium, 180 shops, a supermarket, a post office, a bus interchange and hawker centres, as well as the newly constructed Toa Payoh Town Park.

Four HDB point blocks (Blocks 175, 179, 191 and 193) in Toa Payoh Central were used to house athletes from the seven participating nations. Male Thai and Cambodian athletes and officials shared one block; Malaysian, South Vietnamese and Laotian athletes were in another; while Singaporean and Burmese athletes were the occupants of a third (Block 193). Another block was reserved for female athletes and officials. Each block contained 96 flats, and each flat housed up to six athletes.

Koh Boon Long (b. 1946), a former school principal and national athlete, was one of those who stayed at the Toa Payoh point blocks. He recalled:

"It was good, because there was this building of teamwork and camaraderie, with the foreign athletes as well. What we liked was the food, which [could be] catered [to our dining room]. Toa Payoh was very convenient as well. The

Point blocks, Blocks 191 and 193, that housed athletes during the 1973 SEAP Games, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Players of dum *at the Block 179 void deck, 2022*
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

highlight of every Games was meeting your rivals or competitors from other countries. [Some came from] countries that were very deprived [at that time]. They hardly had proper running shoes, but they had the spirit. Of course, the Malaysians we met them quite often, and the Filipinos."

Following the conclusion of the games, the four point blocks were sold to the public fully furnished. One block in particular, Block 179, located adjacent to Toa Payoh Public Library, is well-known today for the games of checkers (known regionally as "dum") played daily at its void deck. Players say the block has been a hub for the game for at least 30 years, often drawing curious onlookers, and even attracting surreptitious betting.

The nearby Toa Payoh Library opened in 1974 as the second full-time branch of the National Library, and the large fountain in front of the library was a popular meeting point for many residents. The fountain was later replaced by an amphitheatre for community events.

Competition Venues

The mainstay of the games was its training and competition venues: Toa Payoh Swimming Complex and Toa Payoh Stadium. The former had five pools, including two Olympic-sized ones, and hosted the swimming, water polo and diving competitions, while the latter was used for the track and cycling events.

At Toa Payoh Swimming Complex, the national swimming team contributed a handsome 23 gold medals, 16 silvers and nine bronzes to Singapore's final games tally of 45 golds, 50 silvers and 45 bronzes. Among those triumphant at the pool were Patricia Chan, Elaine Sng and Mark Chan, as well as the national water polo team.

The complex went on to serve as a competition venue for the inaugural Youth Olympic Games in 2010, the Asian Swimming Championships in 2006 and the National Schools' Swimming Championships among others.

Today, the facilities are collectively grouped under Toa Payoh Sports Centre which encompasses the swimming complex, stadium, Toa Payoh Sports Hall, gyms and petanque courts among others. The Sports Centre is also the headquarters of the Singapore Table Tennis Association and houses an athlete development centre for the Singapore Swimming Association, while its training and competition facilities have hosted events at the Asian Youth Games and Youth Olympic Games among others. The stadium is also the home ground of professional football club Balestier Khalsa.

People enjoying Toa Payoh Swimming Complex, 1973
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

Diving at Toa Payoh Swimming Complex during the 1973 SEAP Games, 1973
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

NTUC WELCOME SUPERMARKET (NOW NTUC FAIRPRICE)

192 Lorong 4 Toa Payoh

On 22 July 1973, the first National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) Welcome Supermarket was established in Toa Payoh. The opening of the supermarket was in response to the global energy crisis in the 1970s, as fears of a global food shortage led to an inflation in the prices of essential items. To make matters worse for Singaporeans, a number of wholesalers, distributors and shopkeepers were profiteering through arbitrary price increases.

The constant price rises were noticed by then-Minister for Finance Goh Keng Swee, who mooted a consumer cooperative with a large membership to stabilise prices. NTUC was chosen to lead the project because of its mass base of union members.

Toa Payoh was selected as the location for the establishment of NTUC Welcome Supermarket as the town had a large population and the impact on existing provision shops in the area was considered minimal. NTUC Consumers' Cooperative Limited was registered on 14 March 1973, following in the footsteps of NTUC's insurance and taxi cooperatives, to establish cooperative supermarkets.

The supermarket's initial capital was raised through membership subscriptions from union members. Members of the public were also able to buy shares at $50 each, which proved so popular that each individual was restricted to a single share. When the NTUC Welcome Supermarket opened its doors in 1973, over 136,000 shares had been issued to 4,500 members. The opening of the supermarket attracted huge crowds and the supermarket had to close its doors every three to four hours to prevent overcrowding.

Given that NTUC Welcome's goals were to curb profiteering and combat inflationary prices, then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew gave a strong warning to businesses and

Shoppers at NTUC Welcome Supermarket at Toa Payoh, 1973
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

NTUC Welcome Supermarket at Toa Payoh, 1973
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

wholesalers at the supermarket's opening ceremony. He declared that "any wholesaler [who] ... withholds popular or fashionable goods in great demand from this co-op supermarket, to give it to his pet retail network, will be bucking not only the labour movement but also the Government."

Baey Lian Peck, who was NTUC Welcome's first chairman of its board of directors, recalled in his memoirs:

"Since our official goal was to fight inflation, we expected to have a hard time getting supplies from the big wholesalers controlling the market. [After PM Lee's warning to suppliers at the supermarket's opening], [I] brought a cut-out of the report of his speech along with me whenever I went to wholesalers to source for things.

"As part of the country's food security measure[s], [NTUC] Welcome was allowed to import rice. We bought hundreds of tonnes of rice and other basic items to supply the shops for the whole of Singapore."

In 1983, NTUC Welcome merged with the Singapore Industrial Labour Organisation's Singapore Employees Cooperative to form the NTUC Fairprice supermarket chain.

TOA PAYOH DRAGON PLAYGROUND

Lorong 6 Toa Payoh, near Blocks 31 and 264

In the 1960s, playgrounds in HDB estates were characterised by their functional designs and included features such as slides, swings and see-saws. In a bid to encourage more engaging and imaginative play, new series of HDB-designed and built playgrounds were introduced in the 1970s. These designs incorporated slopes, tunnel-like structures, spiral stairways and suspension bridges.

Many of these playgrounds of the 1970s were designed by Khor Ean Ghee, a HDB architect who had had no prior training in designing playgrounds. Recalling his design process, Khor said in a 2012 interview: "The main thing our boss was thinking of was to do something with identity – to turn [local culture] into playgrounds."

He designed a predecessor to the Toa Payoh Dragon Playground at Lorong 6 that was installed at Toa Payoh Town Garden (now Toa Payoh Town Park) in the mid-1970s. This first iteration featured a different design with a longer spine, a metal head and a circular

Early steel globe playground in Toa Payoh, 1969
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

Toa Payoh Dragon Playground, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

monkey bar, but Khor received feedback that the structure was difficult to fabricate and maintain.

Khor thus revised the design for the dragon at Lorong 6 to feature the now-classic elements of a terrazzo-clad head with glass tiles distinguished by bold lines and geometric features. The dragon's body of colourful rings allowed children to climb through and glide down its slides. As the design proved popular, different versions of the dragon head in different colour variations appeared in playgrounds across Singapore.

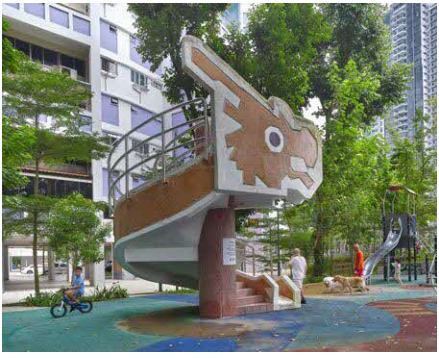
In a 2010 interview, Khor remembered:

"There were so many things to consider, such as whether it would be easy to maintain and whether children jumping on it would cause a lot of noise for the residents. But most importantly, I kept thinking about what the kids would like."

While many of the dragon playgrounds of the 1970s and 1980s have been replaced, the best-known dragon at Lorong 6 remains, even as the block of flats behind it has been demolished. A smaller version also stands along Lorong 1 near Block 240.

As one of the last remaining playgrounds with a dragon design in Singapore, the Toa Payoh Dragon Playground has become an iconic and beloved landmark for Singaporeans, young and old.

Toa Payoh Town Garden (now Toa Payoh Town Park) dragon playground, which was the predecessor to the Toa Payoh Dragon Playground at Lorong 6, mid-1970s
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board



Another variation of the dragon playground at Lorong 1 Toa Payoh, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Aerial view of Toa Payoh town, 2009
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

TOA PAYOH INTO THE FUTURE

Given Toa Payoh's pioneering role in Singapore's public housing history, it is apt that the town continues to innovate and grow. In 2015, HDB announced that Toa Payoh would be rejuvenated under the Remaking Our Heartland (ROH) programme.

Envisioned as a charming pioneer town full of life and greenery, this town-wide rejuvenation will provide enhanced public spaces for community bonding, improved connectivity and opportunities to rediscover the town's heritage. There will be new public housing precincts at Caldecott and Toa Payoh East, as well as a revitalisation of the Lorong 1-Lorong 6 ring road that has been part of life in the town for the last six decades.

The four-kilometre ring road will feature a Nature Way, planted with specific trees and

shrubs to draw birds and butterflies, bringing nature closer to urban residents and fostering biodiversity. Similar to how Toa Payoh Town Park has been a popular space for people to gather, the Nature Way will be complemented by new pocket parks and enhanced green spaces in neighbourhoods.

Fittingly, these improvements to Toa Payoh town take inspiration from Toa Payoh's past, such as how the Nature Way and green spaces will draw on the area's agricultural heritage and feature plants such as nutmeg and pepper.

As the innovations of the past become the beloved landmarks of today, so will they endure and continue to evolve, cementing Toa Payoh's legacy as a pioneer of public housing and a town well-loved by its residents past, present and future.

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For queries or feedback on the contents of this trail booklet, kindly contact us at NHB_HeritageTrails@nhb .gov.sg.

SUGGESTED SHORT TRAIL ROUTES

OF PUBLIC HOUSING & SHARED SPACES

1.5 hours on foot, 4.5 km

As the first town planned and built entirely by HDB, Toa Payoh has been at the forefront of the evolution of public housing in Singapore. This trail explores the architectural development of HDB blocks, communal spaces and town planning, which reflected the needs and aspirations of Singaporean homeowners over the decades.

Begin your journey at Block 53, The "VIP Block" on Lorong 5. Block 53, as well as the surrounding blocks, were among the first blocks built in Toa Payoh town. Built in 1967, the 19-storey block is known for its distinctive Y-shaped design and the prominent cylindrical water tower on its roof. It later gained its reputation as a "VIP block" after visits from prime ministers, presidents and monarchs in the 1960s and 1970s.

Make your way north along Lorong 4 onto Lorong 1, heading west to Block 116. Along the way, keep an eye out for the dragon playground built in 1985 across the road along Lorong 1. Known for its unusual bat-shaped design, Block 116 is unique as most blocks were built based on a linear design in the early 1960s. Both Block 53 and Block 116 also feature extended corridors, a characteristic of early HDB designs that have become less common today.

After exploring Block 116, head south via Lorong 1 to The Peak @ Toa Payoh (Blocks 138 to 139B). The Peak is an HDB redevelopment project completed in 2012 that incorporates features such as roof gardens and mid-tower communal spaces. Continue along Lorong 1 to Block 157, which is situated at the junction of Lorong 1 and Lorong 2. A landmark block dating back to the 1960s, the curving Block 157 is one of the longest semi-circular blocks in Singapore.

Next, walk from Lorong 1 onto Lorong 6 to reach Toa Payoh Town Park, which houses a 25-metre-tall Look-Out Tower conserved by the Urban Redevelopment Authority. Completed in the 1970s, the popularity of this park led HDB to set aside sizeable plots of land for parks in each public housing town that followed. The park's scenic lake, bridges and diverse plant life were often the backdrop for wedding photos during the 1970s and 1980s.

Cross Lorong 6 and walk through the HDB Hub towards Toa Payoh Central. Look north for majestic views of Central Horizon (Blocks 79A to 79E), which can be distinguished by the golden 'crowns' on each block. Built in the 1960s, the original 10-storey Block 79 was one of the longest residential blocks in Singapore then at 296 metres. Block 79 was redeveloped in 2003 as part of the Selective En bloc Redevelopment Scheme into the award-winning five 40-storey blocks to cater to new housing needs.

At the town centre, you will find four landmark point blocks of the Former 1973 Southeast Asian Peninsular (SEAP) Games Village (Blocks 175, 179, 191 and 193). Before executive apartments and maisonettes, point blocks were the most desired HDB flats due to the size and privacy their designs afforded. These point blocks housed athletes during the 1973 SEAP Games and were later sold to the public fully furnished.

Lastly, head east along Lorong 5 and Toa Payoh East, then south through the carpark of Block 29, to Toa Payoh Dragon Playground. Designed and built by HDB, this playground with its terrazzo-clad head and ringed body has become one of the most recognisable icons of Singaporean culture.

OF FAITHS & BELIEFS

2 hours with public transport, 6 km

From its kampong past to the present, religious institutions have been an enduring presence in Toa Payoh. This trail takes you to the temples, mosques, churches and institutions that represent the diverse communities which lived, worked and worshipped in Toa Payoh.

Start your journey at Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery, the oldest Buddhist monastery in Singapore. Completed in 1909, the monastery includes the Hall of Celestial Kings and Mahavira Hall, which were collectively gazetted as a National Monument in 1980. The monastery compound also houses Shuang Lin Cheng Huang Temple, which is a Taoist temple managed by the Buddhist monks of the monastery.

After viewing the monastery, proceed north towards Lorong 8 to Sri Vairavimada Kaliamman Temple. Originally located along Orchard Road, this Hindu temple relocated to Toa Payoh in 1982. The temple's primary deity is Kali, whose sculpture occupies the central position in the temple's majestic *gopuram* (entrance tower).

Head north towards Lorong 8A via Lorong 7 to United Five Temples of Toa Payoh. Completed in 1974, this Taoist temple houses five temples founded during Toa Payoh's kampong past. United Five Temples was the first in Singapore to bring together temples from different Chinese dialect groups and enshrining different deities within one compound.

Then head west via Lorong 6 to Toa Payoh Seu Teck Sean Tong. This temple enshrines Song Da Feng as its primary deity and has practiced Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian traditions since its establishment in 1942. It also includes a facility that houses ancestral tablets and a Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic which provides free medical care to all, regardless of race or religion.

Next, take a stroll down Lorong 6 towards Braddell Road to Masjid Muhajirin. Opened in 1977, this mosque was the first to be built with support from the community and the Mosque Building Fund, which comprises contributions from working Muslims across Singapore. Featuring geometric and floral motifs characteristic of Islamic design on its exterior wall claddings and barricades, the mosque shares its grounds with the headquarters of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) and Madrasah Irsyad Zuhri Al-Islamiah today.

From Masjid Muhajirin, take a bus from across Braddell Road or walk south via Lorong 6 and Lorong 4 to the Church of the Risen Christ. This Catholic church was established in 1971 and has traditionally offered Mass in English, Mandarin and Tamil. In recent decades, it has also drawn parishioners from Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Head west along Toa Payoh Central to Toa Payoh Methodist Church. This institution has its roots in a free clinic and kindergarten established by a group of Christians in the late 1960s. The church building was constructed in 1973 using funds raised by the Methodist community.

Finally, cross Lorong 2 and head east into the town centre to the Tree Shrine at Block 177, also known as Ci En Ge. Since the kampong past of Toa Payoh, the banyan tree where the shrine is located has been regarded as sacred. Today, the shrine is dedicated to the Taoist deities Tian Gong, Guan Yin, Datuk Kong and Tua Pek Kong.

OF COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS & COMMON SPACES

0.5 hours on foot, 1.5 km

Through the decades, community institutions and common spaces have left an indelible mark in the memories of Toa Payoh residents and visitors. This trail brings you to the institutions and spaces that continue to play an active role in the sporting, cultural and social lives of residents and Singaporeans.

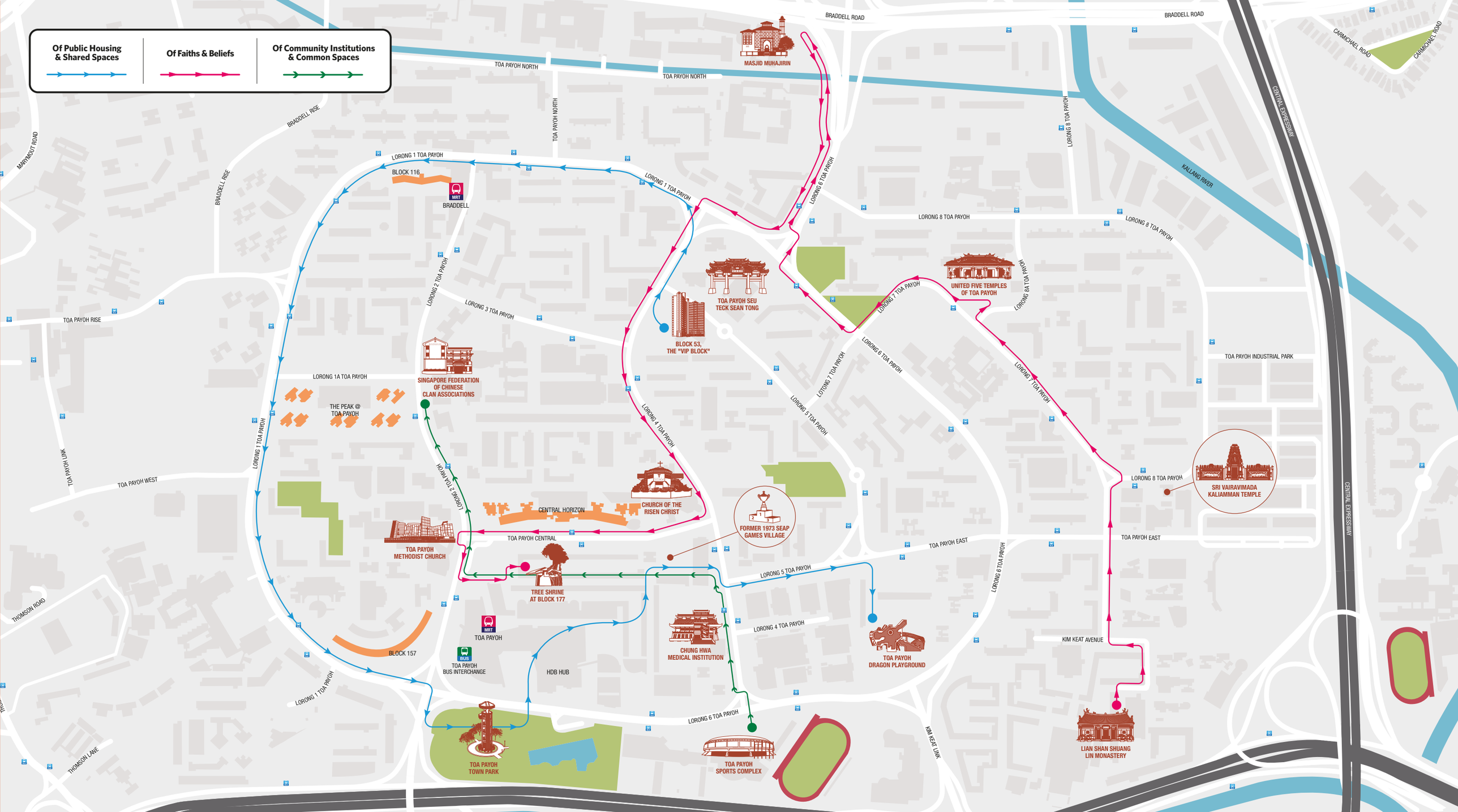
Start your journey at Toa Payoh Sports Complex, which comprises Toa Payoh Stadium, Sports Hall, Sports Centre and Swimming Complex. The complex was constructed in time for the 1973 Southeast Asian Peninsular (SEAP) Games. Over the decades, these sporting facilities have been well-used by athletes in competitions such as the National Schools' Swimming Championships, as well as for community activities.

Head north on Lorong 4 to Chung Hwa Medical Institution, which opened in Toa Payoh in 1978. Established as a free Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) clinic at Chung Shan Association in 1952, community members from all walks of life contributed funds to construct the current building. It has since expanded its research and development into various TCM fields and continues to provide low-cost treatments to patients from all backgrounds.

Next, proceed along Lorong 4 and head west by Toa Payoh Central to Block 179 of the Former 1973 SEAP Games Village. This point block was one of four that athletes stayed in during the 1973 SEAP Games and the proximity of the blocks to everyday amenities such as cinemas and hawker centres allowed them to experience a slice of Singapore life. Today, the block is better known for hosting games of checkers (known regionally as "dum") at its void deck, which regularly brings together enthusiastic players and spectators alike.

Take a short walk west along the town centre's pedestrian mall to the Tree Shrine at Block 177, also known as Ci En Ge. This tree shrine was built by devotees at the foot of a banyan tree which has been regarded as sacred since Toa Payoh's kampong past. The shrine is situated in the heart of the daily bustle of Toa Payoh Central and has attracted worshippers from beyond Toa Payoh.

Finally, head north on Lorong 2 to reach Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations (SFCCA). SFCCA was founded by seven clan associations and formally inaugurated in 1986. Having moved its headquarters to Toa Payoh in 1997, SFCCA promotes Singaporean Chinese culture through events, exhibitions and publications, and funds scholarships and bursaries for underprivileged students and inmates. SFCCA also houses a heritage gallery which allows visitors to explore the history of diverse groups in the Chinese community, as well as local Chinese festivals and cultural practices.


Of Public Housing & Shared Spaces
Of Faiths & Beliefs
Of Community Institutions & Common Spaces
MASJID MUHAJIRIN
BRADDELL ROAD
TOA PAYOH NORTH
BRADDELL RISE
MARYMOUT ROAD
LORONG 1 TOA PAYOH
BLOCK 116
BRADDELL
LORONG 2 TOA PAYOH
LORONG 3 TOA PAYOH
TOA PAYOH RISE
TOA PAYOH SEU TECK SEAN TONG
BLOCK 53, THE "VIP BLOCK"
LORONG 6 TOA PAYOH
LORONG 8 TOA PAYOH
UNITED FIVE TEMPLES OF TOA PAYOH
LORONG 8A TOA PAYOH
LORONG 7 TOA PAYOH
KALLANG RIVER
CENTRAL EXPRESSWAY
CARMICHAEL ROAD
TOA PAYOH INDUSTRIAL PARK
LORONG 1A TOA PAYOH
SINGAPORE FEDERATION OF CHINESE CLAN ASSOCIATIONS
THE PEAK @ TOA PAYOH
LORONG 4 TOA PAYOH
LORONG 5 TOA PAYOH
LOTUNG 7 TOA PAYOH
TOA PAYOH LINK
TOA PAYOH WEST
LORONG 7A TOA PAYOH
CHURCH OF THE RISEN CHRIST
CENTRAL HORIZON
FORMER 1973 SEAP GAMES VILLAGE
SRI VAIRAVIMADA KALIAMMAN TEMPLE
TOA PAYOH METHODIST CHURCH
TOA PAYOH CENTRAL
TOA PAYOH EAST
TREE SHRINE AT BLOCK 177
THOMSON ROAD
TOA PAYOH
BLOCK 157
TOA PAYOH BUS INTERCHANGE
HDB HUB
CHUNG HWA MEDICAL INSTITUTION
TOA PAYOH DRAGON PLAYGROUND
KIM KEAT AVENUE
KIM KEAT LINK
LORONG 6 TOA PAYOH
TOA PAYOH TOWN PARK
TOA PAYOH SPORTS COMPLEX
LIAN SHAN SHUANG LIN MONASTERY
THOMSON LANE

Neighbourhood centre in Toa Payoh with blocks of flats, a market, shops and a playground, 1967
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

The Toa Payoh 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.

Supported by

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MCCY
Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth

Toa Payoh town under construction, 1967
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board