

MEDIA RELEASE

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EXPLORE THE LITTLE ISLAND WITH A BIG HISTORY ON THE NEW SENTOSA HERITAGE TRAIL



(L-R) The former barracks blocks 9 and 10 as pictured during Duke of Edinburgh Prince Philip's visit to Pulau Blakang Mati in 1959 (image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore) are now part of Oasia Resort Sentosa, 2021 (image courtesy of National Heritage Board).

Singapore, 17 March 2022 – To the south of mainland Singapore, the island of Sentosa sits proudly as a multifaceted leisure destination, and a popular respite from the hustle and bustle of the city. But the sandy beaches, hotels, theme parks and attractions belie a long and rich heritage that is waiting to be explored.

2 Featuring 30 heritage sites – including the recently gazetted National Monument Fort Siloso – and supplemented by 10 heritage trail markers, the new ***Sentosa Heritage Trail***, developed by the National Heritage Board (NHB) in partnership with Sentosa Development Corporation (SDC), traces the transformation of the island from a military complex to a leisure destination, uncovers stories of the communities who once lived there, and sheds light on the story of modern Sentosa's reinvention. These trail markers are augmented by another 20 existing interpretive signs to enrich guests' knowledge of Sentosa's history.

3 Existing in records dating back to the 1600s as Pulau Blakang Mati – which translates to "Death from the Back Island" in Malay – the island was home to various coastal communities such as the Orang Laut and other regional groups, and was also coveted by colonial powers due to its strategic location on the much-used straits of Singapore. During World War II (WWII), the construction of Fort Siloso, Fort Serapong and other military facilities marked the island as an

important base for military activity, and some remnants of its wartime past remain hidden in plain sight.

Lesser-known Stories of Sentosa’s Kampong Communities

4 The *Sentosa Heritage Trail* also unearths the history of the early settlers on the island comprising diverse communities across different time periods. Early records dating as far back as the 17th century confirm the presence of Orang Laut communities on the island, who made their living by fishing and selling commodities to passing vessels between mainland Singapore and Blakang Mati. Even after Blakang Mati was turned into a British military outpost, civilian communities still lived on the island, with many continuing to do so even after WWII. These civilian communities made a living by fishing, operating small shops and providing a ferry service between the island and mainland Singapore. For a visual record of Pulau Blakang Mati’s early communities, please refer to the table below.



A village on the northern coast of Blakang Mati, 1935

Courtesy of Sentosa Development Corporation



The shopfront of R. Koh, a photo studio and sundry shop on Blakang Mati, 1956

Courtesy of Stuart James



Former kampongs located next to the jetty on Blakang Mati, 1957

Courtesy of Sentosa Development Corporation

Discover the Island's Rich Military History




5 The *Sentosa Heritage Trail* delves into the island's military history, which began when Singapore became a British colony in the 1800s. Blakang Mati was recognised for its strategic potential in Britain's defence strategy for Singapore, which was centred on defending Keppel Harbour and the shipping straits around the island. The completion of Fort Siloso and other forts and batteries on the island also meant that barracks and quarters to house military personnel had to be built.

6 Many landmarks from Sentosa's time as a military bastion still exist today as buildings which have been seamlessly integrated into Sentosa's modern landscape. Former barracks have been repurposed into hotels and restaurants, while forts and other military structures have been restored and utilised for education and entertainment, giving heritage sites new leases of life to meet the needs of modern visitors. For a visual record of sites that showcase Sentosa's military heritage, please refer to the table below:






Soldiers playing badminton at Fort Siloso, c. 1940-50s

Courtesy of Sentosa Development Corporation

	<p>A military parade by the Royal Garrison Artillery at the parade square, with block 28 in the background, 1918. Blocks 26 and 28 are now part of The Barracks Hotel.</p> <p><i>National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board</i></p>
	<p>Block 16 of the soldiers' barracks, which today houses The Mess Hall, 2021</p> <p><i>Courtesy of National Heritage Board</i></p>
	<p>Blocks 48 and 49 now form the façade of Capella Singapore, 2021</p> <p><i>Courtesy of National Heritage Board</i></p>

From Blakang Mati to Sentosa

7 This year, Sentosa is commemorating the 50th anniversary since the island was established as a leisure destination in 1972. The *Sentosa Heritage Trail* and its companion guide cover the island's early history (including its military heritage) and feature some of its earliest attractions such as the Singapore Cable Car and the site of the former Musical Fountain and Fountain Gardens. The companion guide also includes stories of the island's early days as a leisure destination. In addition, heritage trail markers are placed along remnants of the old monorail track and within Resorts World Sentosa to highlight the locations of these former landmarks. For a visual record of Sentosa's early attractions, please refer to the table below.

	<p>The swimming lagoon located on the southern coast of Sentosa, mid-1970s</p> <p><i>National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board</i></p>
	<p>Cable cars leaving the former Carlton Hill station (now Sentosa Station), mid-1970s</p> <p><i>National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board</i></p>
	<p>A monorail train heading to the west of Sentosa, mid-1980s</p> <p><i>National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board</i></p>

Explore Sentosa's Heritage at Your Leisure

8 Mr Alvin Tan, Deputy Chief Executive (Policy & Community), NHB, said: "Through this trail, we hope to bring Singaporeans and tourists alike on an island journey through time to discover heritage sites and stories – both familiar and unfamiliar. In doing so, we hope that they

will learn more about Sentosa's island, military and leisure heritage, and realize that there is always something new and exciting to discover in Sentosa."

9 Mr Michael Ma, Assistant Chief Executive, SDC, said: "The *Sentosa Heritage Trail* is an opportunity for our guests to unearth Sentosa's storied past. With many of our historic landmarks still existing today, the trail also underscores SDC's commitment to preserving Sentosa's rich history for future generations. The trail complements our recently-launched range of heritage- and sustainability-themed tours, *SentoSights*, and we invite Singaporeans and our guests to rediscover Sentosa in our 50th year as a multifaceted leisure destination."

10 To explore the fascinating history of Sentosa, trail-goers can embark on three thematic, bite-sized routes according to their interests and in their own time. These routes are:

- **Kampongs and Barracks** (2 hours on foot and with public transport), 3km
This route explores the lives and livelihoods of the people of Blakang Mati, as well as their living spaces that included kampongs, barracks, and luxurious bungalows.
- **Forts** (2 hours on foot), 4km
This route explores the extensive fortifications on Sentosa, including Fort Siloso, Imbiah Battery and Fort Serapong, and how they featured in the defence of colonial Singapore.
- **Memories of Sentosa** (1 hour on foot), 2.5km
This route revisits some of the locations that are iconic of Sentosa's reinvention as a leisure destination in the 1970s, and the memories associated with these landmarks.

11 The *Sentosa Heritage Trail's* companion guide and map (the map is available in four languages from early April) can be downloaded from NHB's heritage portal [Roots.gov.sg](https://roots.gov.sg) and [Sentosa.com.sg](https://sentosa.com.sg). Printed copies of the guide will also be available for a limited period at NHB headquarters at Stamford Court.

12 For more information, please refer to:

- [Annex A](#): Thematic trail routes of *Sentosa Heritage Trail*
- [Annex B](#): List of heritage sites in the *Sentosa Heritage Trail* and information on heritage markers
- [Annex C](#): Five lesser-known facts about Sentosa
- [Annex D](#): List of heritage trails developed by NHB

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For media enquiries, please contact:

Charissa Yang

Tate Anzur

9112 7355

charissa.yang@tateanzur.com

Cherell Soon

Tate Anzur

8102 9131

cherell.soon@tateanzur.com

About the National Heritage Board

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. As the custodian of Singapore's heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit.

NHB's mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions, and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the national collection. Through the national collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit www.nhb.gov.sg for more information.

About Sentosa

Sentosa is Asia's leading leisure destination and Singapore's premier island resort getaway, located within 15 minutes from the central business and shopping districts. The island resort is managed by Sentosa Development Corporation, which works with various stakeholders in

overseeing property investments, attractions development, and operation of the various leisure offerings and management of the residential precinct on the island.

The 500-hectare island resort is home to an exciting array of themed attractions, award-winning spa retreats, lush rainforests, golden sandy beaches, resort accommodations, world-renowned golf courses, a deep-water yachting marina and luxurious residences – making Sentosa a vibrant island resort for business and leisure. Making Sentosa its home, too, is Singapore’s first integrated resort, Resorts World Sentosa, which operates South East Asia’s first Universal Studios theme park.

Situated on the eastern end of Sentosa Island is Sentosa Cove, an exclusive oceanfront and residential enclave bustling with some 2,000 homes, romantic quayside restaurants, retail and specialty shops. The Island is also proud to be home to Sentosa Golf Club and its two acclaimed golf courses, The Serapong and The New Tanjong. Sentosa Golf Club hosts the SMBC Singapore Open and the HSBC Women’s World Championship, featuring some of the world’s best golf professionals.

Welcoming a growing number of local and international guests every year, Sentosa is an integral part of Singapore’s goal to be a global destination to work, live and play. For more information, please visit: www.sentosa.com.sg.

SENTOSA HERITAGE TRAIL – THREE THEMATIC TRAIL ROUTES

The *Sentosa Heritage Trail* features three thematic trail routes of varying distances, which the public can embark on in their own time.

1. **Kampongs and Barracks** (2 hours on foot and with public transport, 3km)

From the Orang Laut and kampong settlers to British Army personnel, a diverse range of people and communities have called Pulau Blakang Mati home. This trail explores the lives and livelihoods of the people of Blakang Mati, as well as their living spaces that included kampongs, barracks and luxurious bungalows.

- Sentosa Gateway boardwalk – *People of the Straits trail marker* (Recommended starting point)
- Former recreation ground and barracks
- Barracks at the former parade ground
- Former Royal Engineers' Yard
- Former Officers' Mess and Quarters
- Former military hospital

2. **Forts** (2 hours on foot, 4km)

Pulau Blakang Mati had been identified as a potential defence outpost since at least the 17th century. However, it was only in the late 1800s that the island was militarised, with artillery batteries, forts, barracks and other infrastructure constructed by the British after they took over Pulau Blakang Mati. This trail explores the extensive fortifications on Sentosa, including Fort Siloso, Imbiah Battery and Fort Serapong, and how they featured in the defence of colonial Singapore.

- Siloso Point Station (Recommended starting point)
- Fort Siloso Skywalk
- Fort Siloso
- Siloso Pier
- Imbiah Battery
- Fort Serapong (Optional)

3. **Memories of Sentosa** (1 hour on foot, 2.5km)

Since the 1970s and following its reinvention as a leisure destination, Sentosa has continually refreshed its attractions to adjust to shifting visitor preferences over the decades. A number of former attractions including the Musical Fountain and the monorail helped define Sentosa in the 1980s and 1990s, and still feature significantly in the social memories of Singaporeans. This trail revisits some of these locations and the memories associated with them.

- Siloso Point Station (Recommended starting point)
- Siloso Beach
- Former Sentosa Monorail
- Singapore Cable Car
- Former military hospital
- The Musical Fountain, the Ferry Terminal and the Fountain Gardens

SENTOSA HERITAGE TRAIL SITES AND MARKERS

1. **Fort Siloso***
2. **Siloso Pier***
3. Imbiah Battery
4. Fort Serapong
5. Fort Connaught
6. Berhala Reping
7. Soldiers Blocks (Blocks 16, 17, 26 and 28)
8. Married Soldiers Quarters (Blocks 32, 41-44)
9. **Former Officers' Mess and Quarters (Blocks 48-51)***
10. **Former Recreation Ground and Barracks (Blocks 9-11)***
11. Asiatic Soldiers Block (Block 59)
12. Australia House (Block 69)
13. Former Kashima Jinja
14. **Former Military Hospital***
15. **People of the straits and former kampongs in Sentosa: Kampong Ayer Bandera, Kampong Serapong, Kampong Blakang Mati, and other unnamed kampongs***
16. Former Blakang Mati Integrated Primary School
17. Former Sarong Island
18. Sentosa Golf Club
19. Sentosa Satellite Earth Station
20. **Singapore Cable Car***
21. Former Coralarium
22. Former Maritime Museum
23. Surrender Chambers
24. **Former Sentosa Monorail ***
25. **Former Musical Fountain***

26. Former Fountain Gardens*

27. Former Ferry Terminal*

28. Former Underwater World

29. Former Sentosa Merlion

30. Siloso Beach

** Heritage sites with markers*

Total: 30 sites

Heritage sites featured inside trail markers are in **BOLD** (note that multiple sites can be featured on the same marker as some of these sites are located in close proximity to one another)

FIVE LESSER-KNOWN FACTS ABOUT SENTOSA

1. Sentosa's earliest known inhabitants were the Orang Laut



Stilt houses of the Orang Laut off Pulau Brani, 1900s
Andrew Tan Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



A map of Keppel Harbour, showing Pulau Blakang Mati, 1880s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Living on their roofed *perahus* (boats), the Orang Laut made their living by fishing as well as selling fresh water, palm leaf umbrellas and hats, fruit, fresh and dried fish and other commodities to passing vessels. Given the use of both the Old Strait and New Strait of Singapore in the 17th century, the Orang Laut and other groups operating around Blakang Mati and nearby islands could also be hired as pilots on European vessels to navigate through the reef-strewn straits and to set beacons on dangerous rocks hidden in the straits.

2. In the 1800s, Blakang Mati was a pineapple haven



A pineapple plantation in Singapore, 1880s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Pineapple plantations covered an estimated 200 acres of the 400-acre island, and the island's inhabitants supplied the crop to the mainland. Besides the fruit, the leaves of the pineapple plant could be manufactured into pina cloth, and the Bugis also made fermented pineapple juices from it.

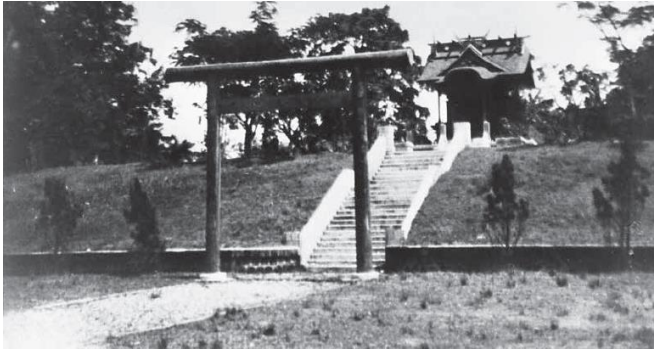
3. The 9.2-inch gun battery at Imbiah Battery is the last of its kind left standing in Singapore



Imbiah Battery, 2021
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

61-metre-high Mount Imbiah was recognised as an important defence point in the late-1800s, and was instated with an infantry redoubt used by troops tasked to defend against enemy landing forces. The turn of the century saw a new battery with a 9.2-inch Mark X Breech Loading gun approved for Mount Imbiah, but the 1936 upgrading and rearmament of Fort Connaught with longer range guns rendered the 9.2-inch gun at Imbiah obsolete, and Imbiah Battery was decommissioned. Despite all the development works on Sentosa in the 1970s, the remains of Imbiah battery have survived and boasts the only intact 9.2-inch gun battery in Singapore.

4. During the Japanese Occupation, a Shinto shrine called Kashima Jinja was erected on Blakang Mati and a number of deer from Java were allegedly relocated there



Kashima Jinja, undated
Courtesy of Sentosa Development Corporation

While little is known of the structure's design or precise location, Kashima Jinja was built in 1943 during the Japanese Occupation, and was said to host Shinto rituals and ceremonies. It was used as a representation of imperial Japanese authority and supremacy in Singapore, as well as in the region, like its sister shrine in Macritchie, Syonan Jinja. A number of deer were allegedly imported from Java and relocated to Blakang Mati, as the animals were held to be messengers of the *kami*, or deities in Shintoism. A former prisoner of war remembered raiding the food offerings left at the shrine to supplement his diet. Syonan Jinja was ritually deconsecrated and destroyed by Japanese soldiers in 1945 when it became apparent that the British were set to retake Singapore, and it is likely that a similar fate befell Kashima Jinja.

5. A Coralarium was among the first attractions that were built in Sentosa



The Coralon tower, mid-1970s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Operating from 1974 to 1995, the Coralarium exhibited a wide variety of corals, seashells and marine invertebrates, including live corals and organisms in display tanks. It also featured a 18m-tall Coralon tower and dioramas on the evolution and life cycles of shells and corals. As it was one of the earliest attractions on Sentosa, a number of former kampong residents of the island were hired as staff there. By the mid-1990s, the Coralarium had become less attractive to visitors and it made way in 1995 for the development of the Sentosa Cove residential estate.

List of Heritage Trails Developed by the National Heritage Board

1. Bukit Timah Heritage Trail
2. Yishun-Sembawang Heritage Trail *(To be refreshed as Yishun Heritage Trail at a later date)*
3. Ang Mo Kio Heritage Trail
4. Balestier Heritage Trail
5. Jalan Besar Heritage Trail
6. Kampong Glam Heritage Trail
7. World War II Heritage Trail
8. Tiong Bahru Heritage Trail
9. Queenstown Heritage Trail
10. Resilience Trails
11. Toa Payoh Heritage Trail
12. Jurong Heritage Trail
13. Singapore River Walk
14. Jubilee Walk
15. Bedok Heritage Trail
16. Little India Heritage Trail
17. Tampines Heritage Trail
18. Orchard Heritage Trail
19. Pasir Ris Heritage Trail
20. Hougang Heritage Trail
21. Sembawang Heritage Trail
22. Sentosa Heritage Trail

For more information, please visit <https://www.roots.gov.sg/nhb/trails>.