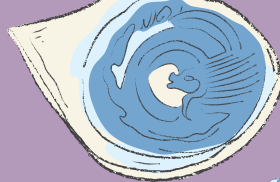
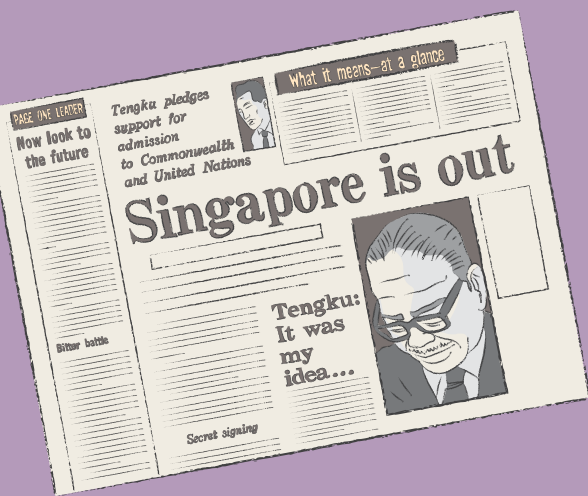


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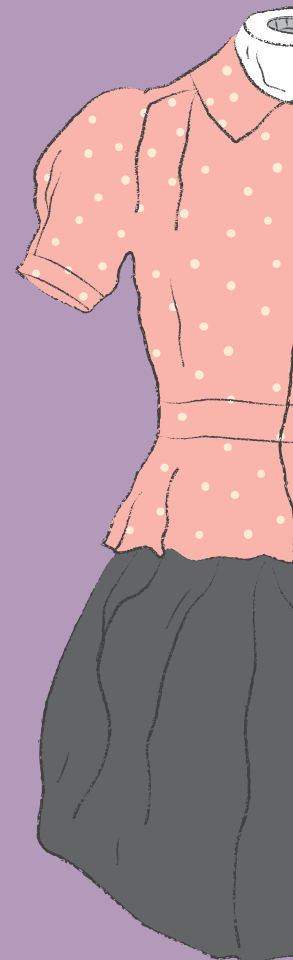
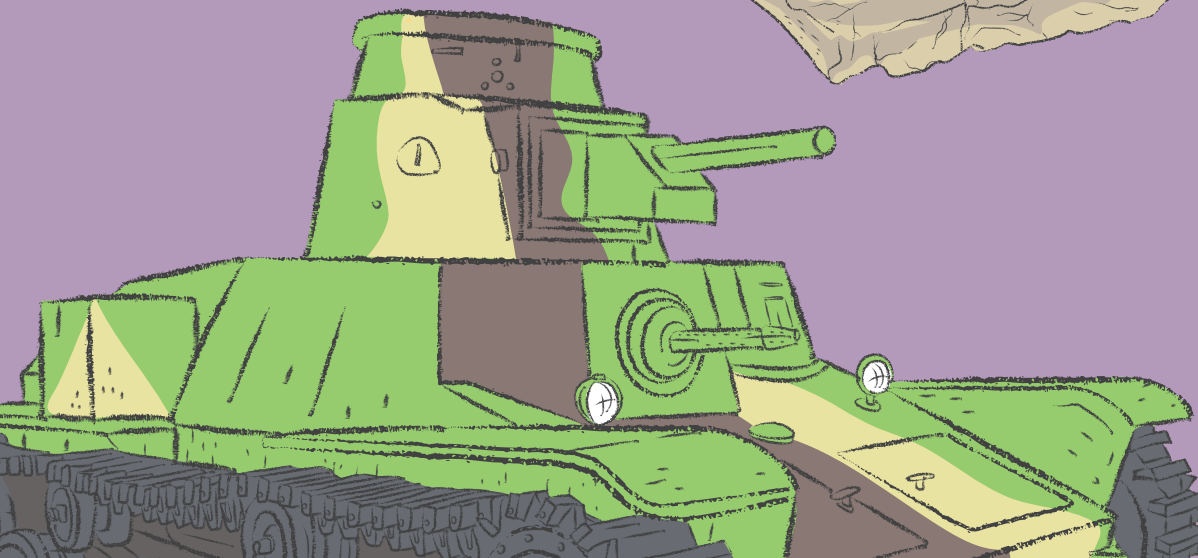
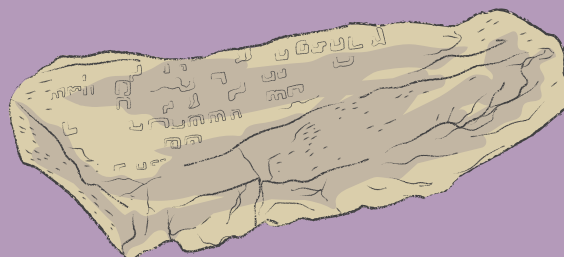
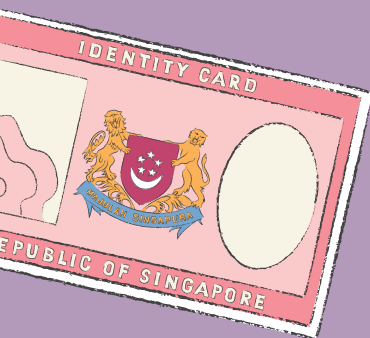


# Singapore History Gallery

# EASY

# GUIDE

## For Senior Groups








# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Welcome to the **Singapore History Gallery!**

This guide can help you conduct a **45-minute** self-led tour for seniors and/or persons with dementia. You may also use this guide to plan the trip before visiting the museum.

This resource guide contains:

-  An overview of the gallery.
-  Artefact highlights from each section.
-  Supplementary Touch Bag (which can be borrowed from the Visitor Services counter on L1).
-  Guiding questions to encourage conversations with your accompanying senior visitor(s).
-  A postcard to keep as a memento after completing a feedback form.

## Some helpful tips



Introduce yourself and get to know your accompanying senior(s)' name(s).



Ask your senior(s) some introductory questions before setting off. E.g. Have you been to the museum before? What do you think you will see at the museum?



Speak clearly and slowly. Use short sentences and simple words where possible.



Ask one question at a time and give your senior(s) time to respond.



Drop clues and examples to prompt your senior(s) in responding. Encourage them to share their views and ideas as they go on the tour. If you are with more than one senior, don't forget those who are quieter!



It is all right if you or the senior(s) do/does not have an answer to guiding questions – take time to discover and journey through the artefacts together!

## Items in the Touch Bag

Feel free to use any of these items to complement your self-led tour.



Textured tiles



Image of the View of Singapore from Mount Wallich



Images of Thian Hock Keng, Al-Abrar Mosque and Nagore Dargah

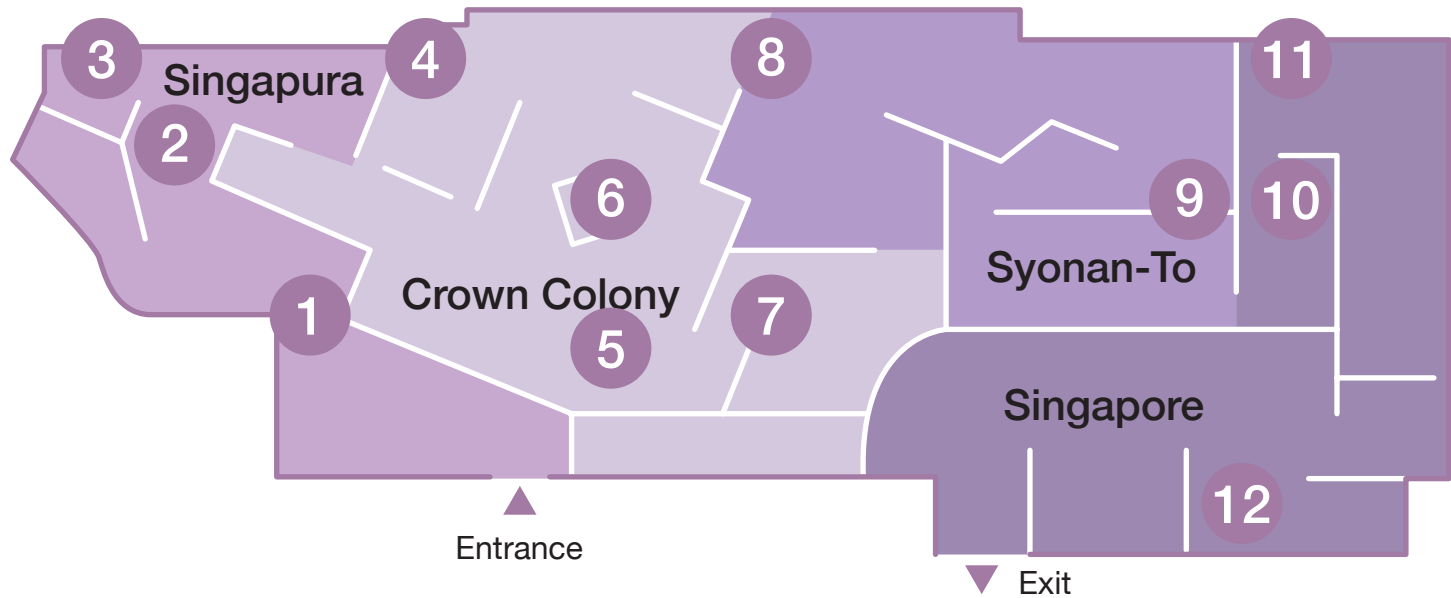


Images of night-soil collectors



Scent bottle

As the Singapore History Gallery is a large space with many artefacts, we recommend that you select from and focus on the artefacts featured in this list. A gallery map has been provided below, with the locations of the artefacts all marked out for you!



The gallery is about 2,228 square metres, or the size of eight-and-a-half tennis courts.

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the **Singapore History Gallery**!

This gallery presents Singapore’s development through 700 years of history, when Singapore was known as Singapura, a Crown Colony, Syonan-To and eventually, present-day Singapore.



From top left: The Singapura, Syonan-To, Crown Colony and Singapore sections in the Singapore History Gallery



# I. SINGAPURA SECTION

## Singapura (1300 – 1800)

Before we begin the tour, let's make a guess. When do you think Singapore's history began?

The oldest rock fragments found in Singapore are from over 250 million years ago. While the earliest written records had described Singapore as a thriving port some 700 years ago, a recent study of the inscriptions on the Singapore Stone suggests that Singapore's history dates as far back as 1,000 years ago.

According to a Chinese trader, Wang Dayuan, Singapore was called Danmaxi (Temasik or Temasek) in the mid-14th century. Whereas in the *Sejarah Melayu* (the Malay Annals), an important source of Malay history, Singapore was known as Singapura.

## 1 Singapore Stone



*Spot the Singapore Stone upon entering the gallery!*



The Singapore Stone (10th – 14th centuries)  
A-1571  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

When the British arrived in Singapore in 1819, they found important relics dating back to the 14th century (1300 – 1399). One of them was a large sandstone boulder – believed to be 3 metres in height and width – discovered at the mouth of the Singapore River. A fragment of this huge boulder is shown in this display.

Legend tells the story of a young man named Badang who wished to be strong. His wish was eventually granted, but only after he ate the vomit of a magic genie. Another strong man heard about Badang and decided to challenge him in a test of strength. While the man could lift a huge rock up to his knees, Badang lifted the same rock over his head and flung it as far as he could – to the mouth of the Singapore River.

In 1843, the huge boulder was blown up by the British to widen the river mouth. All that remains of the boulder in Singapore is this fragment on display here, known as the Singapore Stone. On it are some writings that have yet to be fully translated or understood.

## Let's pause for a chat

- 1 Ask your senior how do they think the inscriptions were made? What kind of tools do they think were used?
- 2 Why did people in the past write on stones? Ask your senior what could have been written on this stone?
- 3 What language do they think the inscriptions are made in?
- 4 While their exact whereabouts remain unknown, records show that two other fragments from the same boulder was sent to a museum overseas. Which country were the fragments sent to?
- 5 If your senior was living in the 1300s, what would they have written on the stone?

## Answers

- 3 Kawi, a script used in the pre-Islamic Malay Archipelago. Kawi was used to write regional languages such as Sanskrit, Malay and Javanese.
- 4 Calcutta Museum in India.

## 2 Archaeological Sherds



Take a closer look at the ceramic sherds on display.



Blue-and-white porcelain (14th – 17th centuries)  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

These pottery fragments from Chinese ceramic pieces date back to the 14th century. They were uncovered by archaeologists in Fort Canning Hill. Archaeologists are individuals who study the buildings, graves, tools and other objects of people who lived in the past.

These fragments show that Singapore was inhabited during this period, and trading activities between the island and the world took place even before the British arrived. Chinese porcelain wares and stoneware dated to the Yuan and Ming dynasties (1279 to 1644) were traded along with other local products. The sherds on display are from some of the earliest pieces of white porcelain with cobalt blue decorations. Singapore was also one of the first places in the world to acquire this type of ceramic.

## Let's pause for a chat

- 1 *Pick up the textured tiles featuring the prints found on the sherds.* Can your senior describe the designs or patterns that they see or feel on these sherds?
  - Can they recognise scrolls, flowers, leaves, ducks and water weeds in these designs?
- 2 Have they seen similar designs or patterns elsewhere? Where they have seen such patterns?
- 3 The archaeologists also found ceramic fragments in other colours and designs. Ask your senior to try looking for them around this display.
  - Which types of ceramic pieces do you and your senior think were more valuable in the 14th century?
- 4 What kind of local products do they think were traded in Singapore in the 14th century?

## Answers

- 3 Greenware was commonly found in 14th-century Singapore as most people would have been able to afford one or two pieces. Pure white porcelain cups and bowls were highly valued for their colour and thin walls.
- 4 Locally-made pottery and natural products such as hornbill casques (the helmet-like structure above the hornbill's beak) and laka wood (aromatic heartwood often used for incense).

### 3 *Sejarah Melayu*



*Sejarah Melayu* (The Malay Annals, 19th century)  
xxxx-02325  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

The *Sejarah Melayu* is a detailed record of the Malay courts of Singapore and Melaka from the 14th to 16th centuries. It is an important source of Singapore and Melaka's history.

The oldest known version was compiled in 1612 by Tun Sri Lanang, a court official at the capital of the Johor sultanate. Most existing manuscripts of the *Sejarah Melayu* date from the 19th century. The one on display is the original manuscript from which the 1896 edition in the collection of Reverend Dr W.G. Shellabear was printed. Reverend Shellabear held many posts, one of which involved devoting himself to the study of the Malay language, literature and Islam, and translating several works.

### Let's pause for a chat

- 1 Several legends about Singapore came from the *Sejarah Melayu*. Can your senior guess some of these legends?
- 2 Does your senior have a habit of writing a diary or keeping records of major events in their life? Ask them to tell you more.
- 3 If your senior had the chance to preserve a piece of their own writing, what would it be about?
- 4 There are many ways to record one's life today, from writing to audio and video recordings. Which medium would your senior prefer and why?

*Try asking your senior to describe their memories or impressions of the museum and record this with your phone. Play it back to your senior and ask them how it feels to have a part of their history recorded.*

### Answers

- 1 The story of strong man Badang; the story of Sang Nila Utama, a prince from Palembang who gave Singapura its name; as well as the tragic story of the quick-witted boy who saved Singapore from a shoal of swordfish.



## II. CROWN COLONY SECTION

### Crown Colony (1819 – 1941)

In 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles and Major William Farquhar arrived in Singapore. They made a deal with the local Malay rulers to set up a tax-free British trading port. This drew traders and ships from afar, such as Arabia and Africa. By the 1850s, Singapore was the centre of trade in Southeast Asia.

In 1867, Singapore became a Crown colony (a territory outside of Great Britain that was controlled by the British Government). Singapore flourished alongside the British empire, and its population grew with migrants from the Malay Archipelago, China and South Asia. Some came to trade, but many more came to work in the port city as well as the plantations and mines of Malaya.

## 4 Mount Wallich Painting: View of Singapore from Mount Wallich



Take a few moments to observe the details in the painting.



View of Singapore from Mount Wallich (1856)

A-1571

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

This painting of the view of Singapore from atop Mount Wallich is by Percy Carpenter, a British artist who lived in Singapore for nearly a year. The painting shows nearly the entire Singapore River settlement and inland areas back in the 19th century.

Mount Wallich was levelled towards the end of the century, and Tanjong Pagar MRT station now sits in its place. While most of the landscape has changed drastically, a handful of iconic landmarks still exist.

These include:

- Thian Hock Keng
- Al-Abrar Mosque
- Nagore Dargah
- Lau Pa Sat (or the Telok Ayer Market)
- St Andrew's Cathedral

## Let's pause for a chat

1 *Pick up the giant images of the painting from the bag.*

- Can your senior spot the green roof of Thian Hock Keng?
- What about the twin pillars of Al-Abrar Mosque and Nagore Dargah?

2 Has your senior been to any of the above places? Ask them to tell you more about their visits to these places during their younger days.

3 *Pick up the set of pictures of these landmarks today.* Ask your senior to compare the pictures of the respective landmarks and identify what has changed.

4 Do your seniors still visit these landmarks today? Ask them to share why or why not.

5 How do your seniors feel when places they used to visit have changed drastically or no longer exist?

### Answers:

1



## 5 Night-soil Bucket



*Walk along the five-foot way and shophouse façade. Night-soil collectors were a common sight in the back alleys of these shophouses.*



Night-soil bucket  
2000-07343  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

*Head to the Night-soil Bucket on display. Pick up the images of the night-soil collectors.*

Before toilets with proper plumbing were available, iron buckets like these were used to collect human waste from households.

Night-soil collectors would collect and empty these buckets every night before transferring the human waste to gardens and plantations outside of the city. The Municipality's attempt to introduce a town sewage collection made little progress until the 1920s. While this was due to financial and technical challenges, there was also general resistance from the population that did not like colonial interference in their way of life.



## Let's pause for a chat

- 1 Has your senior seen or perhaps used one of these night-soil buckets? Ask them to share more.
- 2 What were the toilets like for your seniors when they were growing up?
  - Did they have to share toilets in *kampungs*?
  - How was human waste disposed of?
- 3 Ask your senior to compare the toilets we use today to those they used when they were younger. What has changed?
- 4 How do they feel about these changes?
- 5 Does your senior recall the first time they used a toilet with a flushing system? What did they think of the system then?



## 6 Rickshaw



*Pause to watch the video of rickshaws in the olden days.*



Rickshaw (Late 19th century)  
FL-0423  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

Rickshaws first appeared in Japan in 1868. Twelve years later, this form of transport was introduced to Singapore. Rickshaws were either imported from Japan or made locally. The rickshaw on display seats only one passenger.

While rickshaws became a common form of affordable transport in the 1890s, it was hard work for the rickshaw pullers. As its Mandarin name suggests, rickshaws were man-powered carriages (人力车).

The rickshaw pullers had to work 10 to 12 hours a day just to earn 30 to 40 cents.

## Let's pause for a chat

- 1 Has your senior heard stories about their parents or grandparents riding a rickshaw? Can they share it with you?
- 2 Apart from rickshaws, what other modes of transport could be found on the streets of Singapore in the early 20th century?  
*Hint: Watch the video footage beside the display.*
- 3 The rickshaws in Hong Kong were usually single-seaters while those found in Singapore could typically seat two people. What could be the reason for this?
- 4 When did rickshaws disappear from Singapore's streets and why do you think that happened?
- 5 Has your senior seen the trishaws around Chinatown today? How different are they from rickshaws?

## Answers

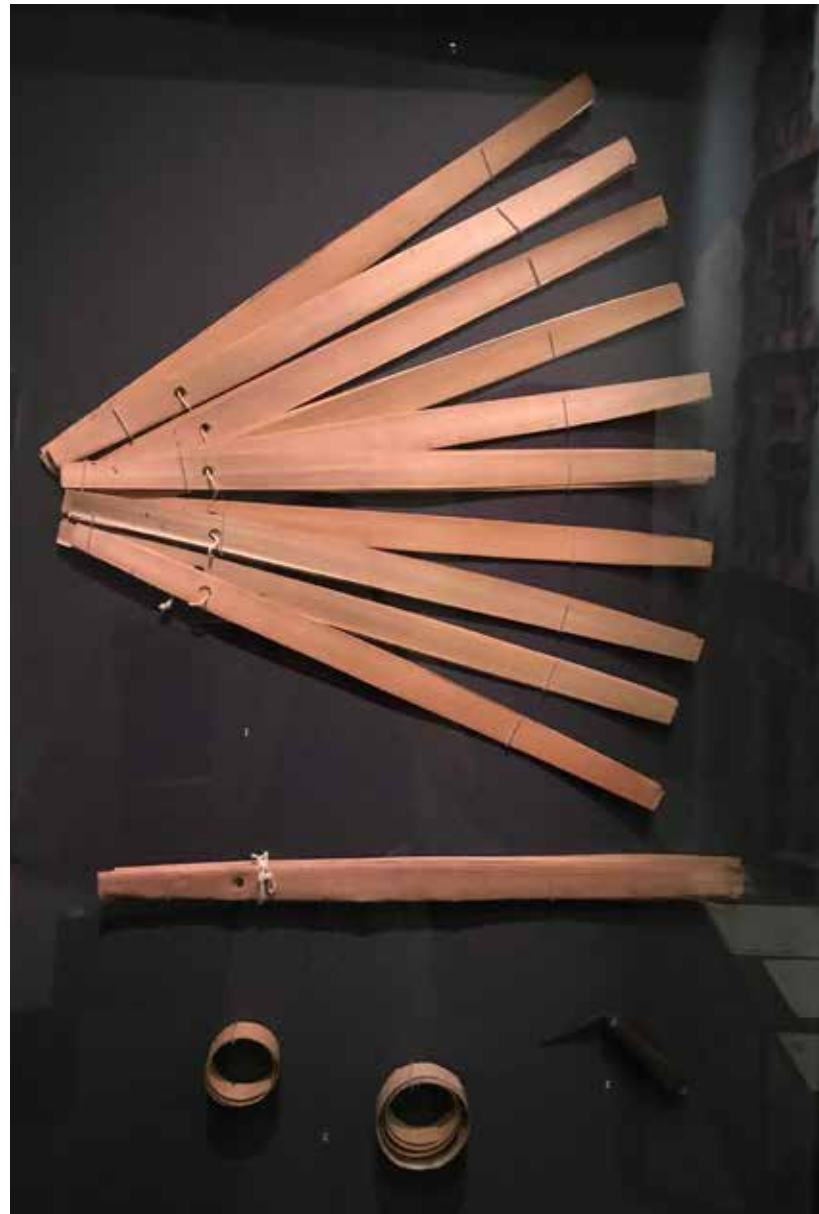
- 2 Horse-drawn carriages and bullock carts.
- 3 Singapore's roads were less hilly and steep and ferrying two people was considered manageable. However, first-class single-seaters grew in popularity after 1904 as rickshaw-pullers earned the same amount ferrying only one person over the same distance.
- 4 In the late 1920s. This was due to safety concerns given the increase in motor traffic.



## 7 Ola Leaf Scroll used by Chettiars



*Find the room where objects used by the Chettiars are on display.*



Ola leaf scroll (1890s)  
On loan from N. Subbiah  
On display at the National Museum of Singapore

Before paper became a common writing material, ola leaves were used by the Chettiars to record both their business transactions and temple donations. They wrote on the treated palm leaf by piercing its surface and inking it to make the letters visible.

The Chettiars came from southern India and were often associated with money-lending activities. They mostly conducted their businesses in *kittangis* (“warehouse” in Tamil), which were mostly located at Market Street before 1977.



## Let's pause for a chat

- 1 Does your senior recall seeing Chettiars while growing up? Can they describe the clothes they wore and the business they ran?  
*Hint: Look for photos of the Chettiars hung near the display.*
- 2 Does your senior think he or she can write easily on these palm leaves? Why or why not?
- 3 What do they think happened to borrowers who failed to repay their debt?
- 4 The Chettiars also used palm leaves for another purpose. Can your senior guess what this was? *Hint: Let your senior take a whiff of the turmeric in the scent bottle.*
- 5 Can your senior think of other uses for palm leaves?

## Answers

- 3 In cases where the client failed to pay his debt, the case was brought to the court. After the judge had ruled on the case, a judgement would be issued.

The Chettiars also kept lists of individuals who were late in paying their loan instalments. They even recorded the amount to be claimed from their client's next of kin or guarantor should the client pass away before fully settling his debt.

- 4 The Chettiars were religious. On the first day of the new accounting year, they would make donations to Lord Murugan in the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple at Tank Road. Donors would be given palm leaf "receipts" smeared with turmeric, which was considered to be auspicious.

# III. SYONAN-TO SECTION

## Syonan-To (1942 – 1945)

Before World War Two began, the British had developed the “Singapore strategy” to defend the British empire in Asia. They built a naval base, strengthened the air force, and installed large guns along the coast – which contributed to the impression of an impregnable “Fortress Singapore”.

Singapore nonetheless experienced war for the first time with the Japanese bombing the city on 8 December 1941. Within 70 days, the Japanese – to almost everyone’s surprise – defeated the British and occupied the Malay Peninsula and Singapore.

The British surrendered on 15 February 1942. Singapore was placed under Japanese military occupation and renamed Syonan-To (“Light of the South” in Japanese). For three years and eight months, the Singapore population struggled with food shortages, widespread diseases, and violence and harassment from the Japanese. The Japanese Occupation officially ended with the Japanese surrendering at the Municipal Building of Singapore on 12 September 1945.

## 8 Tank



Take some time to read the graphic on the wall.



Type 95 Ha Go Japanese tank  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

This is a replica of the “Type 95 Ha Go”, the most common Japanese tank used in World War Two. During the battle in Singapore, the original Japanese tanks broke the British defence and helped the Japanese army reach Bukit Timah within a few days of their initial army landings in northern Singapore.

This replica was one of the four made for American filmmakers Tom Hanks’ and Steven Spielberg’s television mini-series, *The Pacific* (2010).

## Let’s pause for a chat

- 1 Has your senior seen a tank like this before? If so, where?
- 2 How did your senior react when they saw similar tanks in their younger days? If they did not experience the Japanese Occupation, can they share stories they have heard about Japanese tanks and bicycles from this period?
- 3 How many of such tanks does your senior think were produced by the Japanese for the entire war?
- 4 How many tanks did the Allies use in Singapore?
- 5 What other modes of transport did the Japanese soldiers use during their invasion of Singapore? *Hint: Explore this gallery to find other modes of transport.*

## Answers

- 3 Over 2,000.
- 4 None. The Allies used a variety of armoured cars and carriers but did not use tanks.
- 5 Bicycles. The Japanese forces were able to swiftly move down the Malay Peninsula on bicycles.



## 9 Elizabeth Choy



*Spot the clothes worn by Elizabeth Choy.*



Elizabeth Choy's clothing (1940s)

Gift of Elizabeth Choy

1992-00211 and 1992-00212

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

These clothes were worn by Elizabeth Choy during her detention and arrest by the Japanese military police (also known as Kempeitai) in 1943. Elizabeth Choy and her husband ran a hospital canteen where prisoners-of-war (POWs) bought food.

However, during a raid, Elizabeth Choy and her husband were arrested on suspicion of smuggling radio parts to British POWs and supplying information to the Allies.

For 200 days – the longest period a female civilian was held in captivity – she was detained with other prisoners in a tiny cell at the former YMCA building. Even though she was interrogated and tortured, she refused to confess to crimes that she did not commit.



## Let's pause for a chat

- 1 Ask your senior how they thought Elizabeth Choy managed to persevere through her 200-day detention? What do they think kept her going?
- 2 Has your senior encountered people who were detained by the Japanese during the war? Can they share what happened?
- 3 Has your senior encountered or heard stories of the Japanese conducting raids? Can they describe the atmosphere during that period of time?
- 4 If your senior were to experience a similar situation, how do they think they would react?
- 5 What keeps your senior going through tough times?

## IV. SINGAPORE SECTION

### Singapore (1945 – 2015)

When the Japanese defeated the British, the perception of Western superiority or power was shattered. Many in Singapore wanted independence from the colonial rule. Different political parties and groups were formed, and they vied to lead Singapore to independence. “*Merdeka*” (“freedom” in Malay) became the rallying cry among the people.

In 1959, Singapore was granted self-government and the first general election for a fully-elected government was held. The People’s Action Party won and its founder and Secretary General, Lee Kuan Yew, became Singapore’s first prime minister.

Over the next 20 years, the new government tackled many post-war problems, which included unemployment and housing. They led Singapore through a period of industrialisation, encouraged foreign investment and tourism, provided public housing and education, and cleaned up the country.

## 10 Video on Singapore's separation from Malaysia



Take a seat and watch the video.



Video on Singapore's separation from Malaysia (1965)  
On display at the National Museum of Singapore

9 August 1965 marks Singapore's independence. On this day, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew announced Singapore's separation from Malaysia in a televised press conference. The display here features a seven-minute snippet of the televised press conference.



## Let's pause for a chat

- 1 Take a look at the headlines on the wall. Ask your senior if they recall reading about the merger and separation.
- 2 *Take a seat and watch the video with your senior if they have not already done so.* Does your senior remember this scene in the video? Ask your senior to recount what they were doing at that time.
- 3 How did they feel when they learnt about the separation on television?
  - Can they remember anything in particular about the scene in the video?
- 4 How do they feel seeing this scene after more than 50 years later?
- 5 While your senior was growing up, what were the challenges Singapore faced after separation, and what was the mood like?



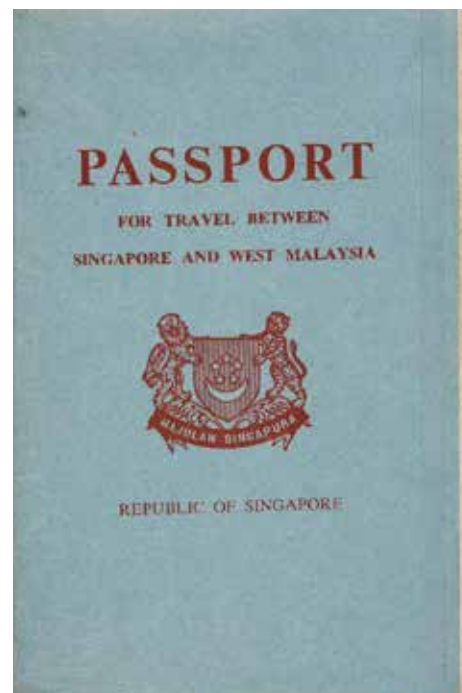
## 11 Singapore Passport and Singapore National Registration Identification Card (NRIC)



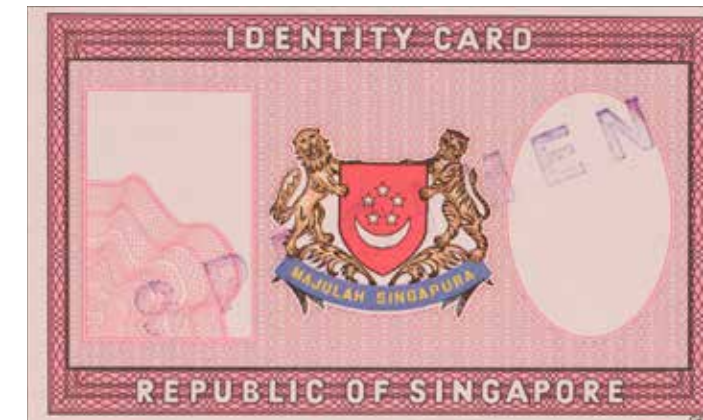
*Can you find the old Singapore Passport, Singapore Restricted Passport and NRIC?*



Yap Soo Eng's Singapore passport  
Gift of Mei-Mei Moore  
2011-00730  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore



Koo Lew Meng's Singapore restricted passport  
Gift of Koo Hang Lian  
2005-01280  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore



Singapore National Registration Identification Card  
2015-00216  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

After obtaining self-governance in 1959, Singapore gained several “first” experiences. Singapore had its first Head of State (Encik Yusof Ishak), prime minister and a set of national symbols. For the Singapore population, they were issued Singapore’s first identity cards and passports.

In May 1966, a national registration exercise was held alongside the introduction of a new identity card for Singapore citizens as shown in the display. In June that same year, a new permanent Singapore passport was introduced.

Due to the high number of people commuting from Singapore to West Malaysia, a Singapore Restricted Passport (SRP) was introduced in 1967 to ease the travelling process. The SRP eventually ceased to be valid on 31 December 1999 as there was less demand for it over the years.



## Let's pause for a chat

- 1 Does your senior remember receiving their first passport? Ask them to describe how they received it.
- 2 Has your senior ever owned a restricted passport or know anyone who owned one? How was it different from the Singapore passport?
- 3 Likewise, how did they feel receiving their first identification card?
- 4 Did receiving their passport and identification card make your senior feel more attached to the country? Why or why not?
- 5 Take a closer look at the passport and the identification card on display. How different are they from today's versions?

## 12 HDB Flat



Step into the mock-up of a HDB unit and have a look around the space.



HDB flat set-up (1970s – 1980s)  
On display at the National Museum of Singapore

This is a set-up of a kitchen in a Housing and Development Board (HDB) unit during the 1970s and 1980s. Back then, this was considered to be a modern space that reflected the conveniences and lifestyles that families desired. The household appliances on display were once the prized possessions of Singaporean families, who only made the purchase when they could finally afford them.

The HDB was set up in 1960 to build simple and standard flats as quickly as possible, and to provide affordable housing for low-income families. There was an urgent need to tackle the lack of affordable housing and poor living conditions in the decade before.

From 1968, Singaporeans could also use their Central Provident Fund (CPF) savings to purchase their flats under the Public Housing Scheme. Home ownership became a reality for many families. By 1980, 67% of the population had moved from shophouses and *kampungs* into HDB flats.



### Let's pause for a chat

- 1 Take a seat in the flat or where the green space is, and discuss with your senior. Does your senior recall buying his or her first home? Ask them to share more.
- 2 Can your senior recognise some of these kitchen appliances?
- 3 Ask them to share if they recall their first time buying each of these appliances?
  - How much did they cost?
  - How long did they have to save up?
- 4 Refrigerators were believed to be the most desired appliance back then. Which appliance was the most precious to your senior?
- 5 Do they own similar appliances today? Or do they own a wider variety of appliances today given the rapid advancements in technology?

We have reached the end of the self-led tour of the Singapore History Gallery. We hope you were able to take a walk down memory lane and relive some of your growing up days.

If you borrowed a Touch Bag for the tour, please return the bag at the Visitor Services Counter on L1.

We would love to hear from you! Please share your feedback by visiting <https://go.gov.sg/easyguidefeedback> or by scanning this QR code.



On completion, present the submission page to a staff at the Visitor Services counter to redeem a postcard.

Alternatively, you may request for a hard copy of the feedback form from the staff at the Visitor Services counter and present the completed form to redeem a postcard.

*All information is correct at time of publication. The National Museum of Singapore reserves the right to make changes and modifications to the galleries without prior notice.*

Visit [www.nationalmuseum.sg](http://www.nationalmuseum.sg) for more information about senior programmes at the National Museum of Singapore.