



Singapore History Gallery

For Seniors



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Welcome to the Singapore History Gallery!

This guide is designed to lead you through a **45-minute** self-led tour to explore some of the key artefacts in this gallery. You may also use this guide to plan your trip before visiting the museum.

This resource guide contains:



Overview of the gallery.



Artefact highlights from each section.

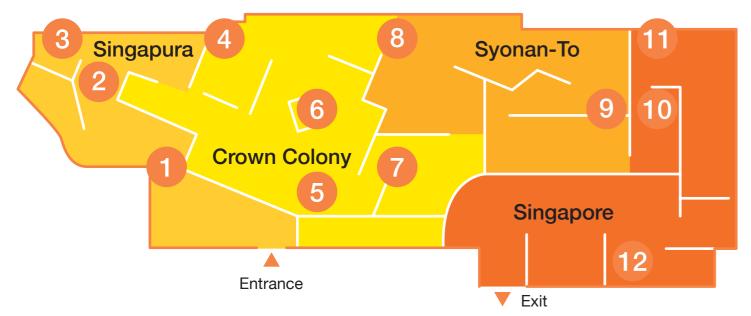


Guiding questions for self-reflection and/or conversations among you, your family and friend(s) during the visit.



A postcard to keep as a memento after completing a feedback form.

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



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

Legend

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the **Singapore History Gallery!**

This gallery presents Singapore's development over 700 years of history, when it 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 date back to 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





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 to think:

- How do you think people made the inscriptions on this stone? What kind of tools do you think were used?
- Why do you think people in the past wrote on stones? What could have been written on this stone?
- If you were living in the 1300s, what would you have written on the stone?

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 to think:

- What designs or patterns can you identify on these sherds?
- The archaeologists also found ceramic fragments in other colours and designs. Try looking for them around this display. Which types of ceramic pieces do you think were more valuable in the 14th century?
- Which groups of people were more likely to use such blue-and-white porcelain then? What about today?

Answers:

- 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.
- They were likely used by the well-to-do in the 14th century.

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 to think:

- Several legends about Singapore came from the Sejarah Melayu.

 Can you guess which are some of these legends?
- If you could preserve a piece of your own writing or record a part of your life, what would it be about?
- Why do you think people wanted to make records of history or stories?

Answers:

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.

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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 to think:

- Can you spot the three places of worship in this painting?

 Hint: Look for the green roof of Thian Hock Keng, or the twin pillars of both the Al-Abrar Mosque and Nagore Dargah.
 - Today, these three places of worship no longer face the sea. What do you think happened?
- Have you been to any of the above places? How have these places changed?
- How do you feel when places you used to visit have changed drastically or no longer exist?

Answers:





Land reclamation took place from as early as the 1800s.

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

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 and think:

- Have you seen or heard stories of an older family member who used one of these night-soil buckets?
- What were the toilets like for you when you were growing up?
- Compare that experience with the toilets today how different are they?

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 and think:

- 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?
- When did rickshaws disappear from Singapore's streets and why do you think that happened?
- The rickshaw puller was a popular subject of photography. He was an object of curiosity for Western tourists, and was often posed against scenic backgrounds such as the Botanic Gardens or the Esplanade, without any hint of the toil and sweat he faced every day. Look around the gallery to find postcards that depicted rickshaw pullers in this manner.

Answers:

- 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.
- In the late 1920s. Given the increase in motor traffic, the British colonial government banned them due to safety concerns.

7 Ola Leaf Scroll used by Chettiars





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.

They often held property as security for the repayment of loans. During the Great Depression (1929 to 1939), when local businessmen could not repay their loans, many Chettiars became owners of rubber plantations, tin mines and shophouses in Malaya.

The Chettiars were religious as well. 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.

Let's pause and think:

- Do you recall seeing Chettiars while growing up? Can you describe the clothes they wore and the business they ran? Hint: Look for photos of the Chettiars hung near the display.
- What do you think happened to borrowers who failed to repay their debt?
- What are the differences between the money-lending business of the Chettiars and legal money-lending companies today?

Answers:

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.

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.





Take some time to read the graphic on the wall.



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

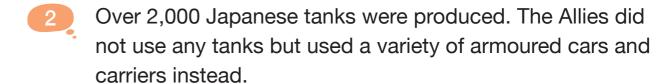
This is a replica of the "Type 95 Ha Go", the most common Japanese tank used in World War Two. During the battle in Singapore, the original Japanese tanks broke the British defence and helped the Japanese army reach Bukit Timah within a few days of their initial army landings in northern Singapore.

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 and think:

- Have you seen a tank like this before?
- How many of such tanks do you think were produced by the Japanese for the entire war? Likewise, how many tanks did the Allies use in Singapore?
- What other modes of transport did the Japanese soldiers use during their invasion of Singapore? Explore this gallery to find out more!

Answers:









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 and think:

- How do you think Elizabeth Choy persevered through the period of her detention and torture for 200 days? What do you think kept her going?
- If you were to experience a similar situation, how would you have dealt with it?
- What keeps you going through tough times?

IV. SINGAPORE SECTION

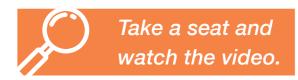
Singapore (1945 - 2015)

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, become Singapore's first prime minister.

Over the next 20 years, the new government tackled many postwar 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





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 sevenminute snippet of the televised press conference.

Let's pause and think:

- Take a look at the headlines on the wall. Do you recall reading about the merger and separation?
- How do you feel seeing this scene of Lee Kuan Yew announcing Singapore's separation from Malaysia, after more than 50 years later?
- While you were growing up, what were the challenges Singapore faced after separation, and what was the mood like?

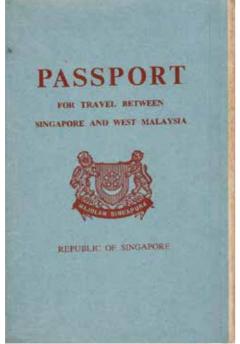
Singapore Passport and Singapore National Registration Identification Card (NRIC)



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 and think:

- Take a closer look at both passports. How is it different from the passport you have today?
- Have you ever owned a restricted passport or know anyone who owned one? How was it different from the Singapore passport?
- Does receiving the Singapore passport and identification card make you feel more attached to the country? Why or why not?





Step into the mock-up of an 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 and think:

- Take a seat in the flat or outside where the green space is.

 Do you recall buying your first home?
- Refrigerators were believed to be the most desired appliance back then. Which appliance was the most precious to you when you first bought your home?
- Do you own similar appliances today? Or do you have 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.

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 for more information about senior programmes at the National Museum of Singapore.