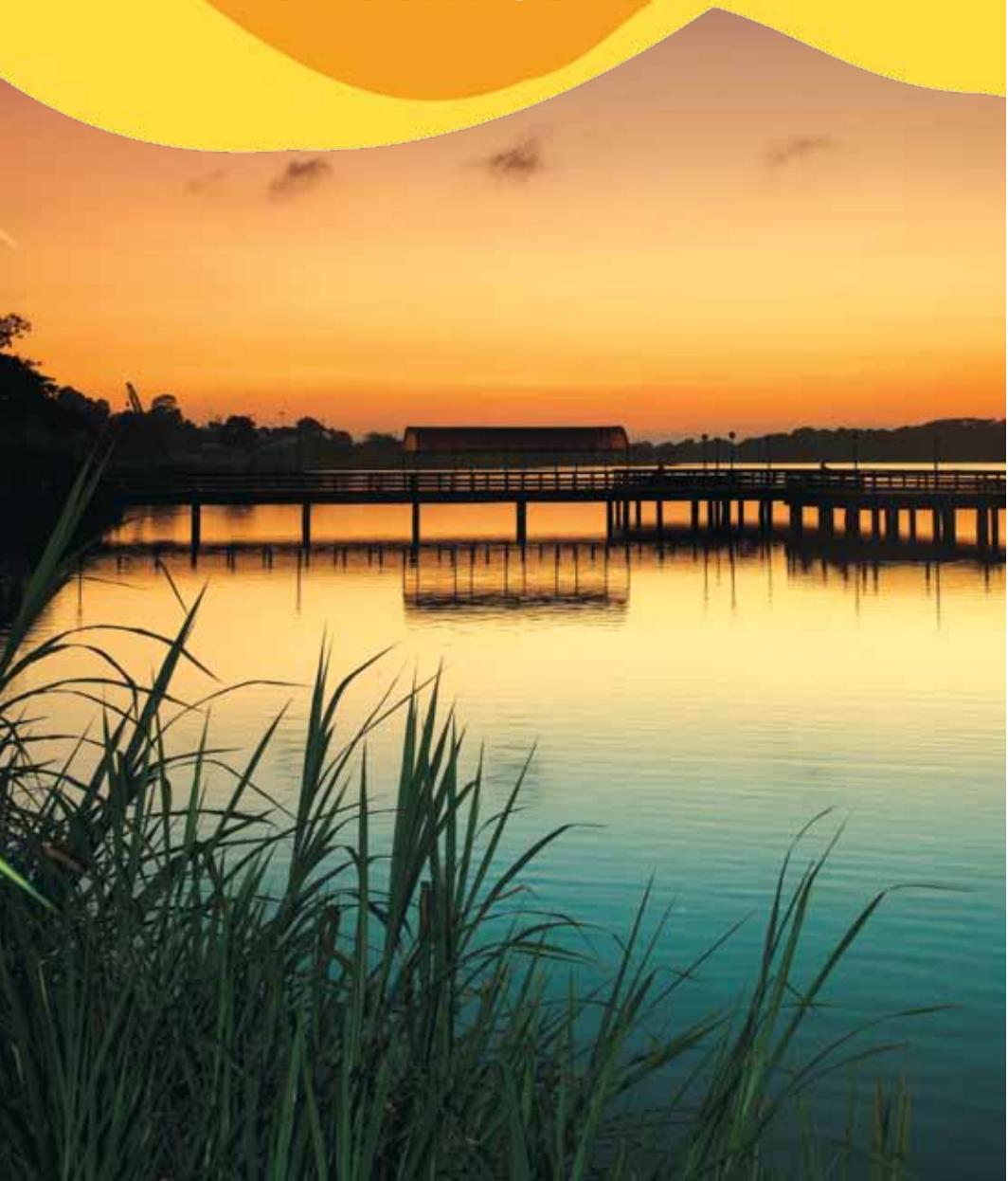


Yishun Sembawang

A HERITAGE TRAIL



The historical links of the new towns do not just end here. Yishun and Sembawang share the same story of development too. From gambier and pepper planting in the 1800s to rubber and pineapple planting in the early 1900s, plantations would usually be established along Seletar River first, before extending towards Sungei Sembawang in the north.

The opening of the Singapore Naval Base in 1938 also led to development in this area. To support the Naval Base, military installations such as airbases and barracks were built in the vicinity. As such, businesses were set up in villages near these bases to meet the needs of the military personnel and their families. Migrants from places such as India also flocked here in search of work in the base. They brought with them their cultures and their legacy is still seen in Yishun and Sembawang today. The many

religious buildings that still stand today, the many traditional performing arts groups that made this area their home base and the many old buildings that stand majestically here are all testimony to the rich multicultural and multireligious and colourful heritage of Yishun and Sembawang.

To find out more about the personal and community stories behind Yishun and Sembawang, slap on your sunscreen, bring plenty of water and embark on this heritage trail today! The trail begins at Singapore's first outdoor heritage space, "Heritage Garden @ Yishun", located at Yishun Central and winds up at the scenic Upper Seletar Reservoir. In between, churches, mosques, temples, schools, parks and even old houses make appearances to tell you their stories. However, take note that the area covered is extensive so do make use of public transport!



This Yishun and Sembawang Heritage Trail is part of the National Heritage Board's (NHB) on-going efforts to document and present the history, social memories and places that Singaporeans live, work and play in that many may not be aware of. Jointly presented by the National Heritage Board and Housing and Development Board, this trail will bring back fond memories for older residents and will be an eye-opener for new residents.

Yishun New Town



Yishun New Town, 1980s.
(COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)



Model showing the concentric road layout
(COURTESY OF HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD)

The trail begins at the Heritage Garden @ Yishun, in front of the Housing and Development Board's Branch Office in Yishun Central 1. Launched in 2010, this is Singapore's first outdoor heritage space.

HERITAGE GARDEN @ YISHUN

This joint project between the Housing and Development Board and National Heritage Board tells the story of Yishun and Sembawang from the days of gambier and pepper planting in the 1800s to the development of the new towns in the late 1900s.

YISHUN NEW TOWN

Right up to the 1970s, Yishun New Town, as we know it today, was covered with farms and villages. Urbanisation in this area began in 1976 with the construction of Yishun New Town. By 1986, it had become a modern satellite town, with more than 28,000 units built and over 110,000 residents.

With the completion of the Yishun Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) station in 1988, and the opening of the Cineplex, Yishun 10, and Northpoint Shopping Centre in 1992, Yishun soon became a popular destination for Singaporeans!

Comprehensively planned, Yishun Town is characterised by its road layout. Concentric rings such as Yishun Ring Road are linked by radial roads, making it easier to get from one neighbourhood to another. Natural features are also considered in the town's planning. As you continue on the trail, observe how hills and waterways form part of the town's design.

"Yishun is my home. Over the years, I saw the changes, and I'm part of the progress. When my family moved in, there was no bus stop, and I saw it constructed. Then I saw Yishun transforming, like Lower Seletar Reservoir, the cinema, and now the new hospital. And there are people, if I don't see them, I would wonder where they went. It's that kind of familiarity."

Mr. Eric Tay (b. 1963), resident of Yishun since 1989



MRT train with Lim Nee Soon's former rubber factory in the background, 1989.
(SOURCE: MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS, AND THE ARTS, COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)

LIM NEE SOON (1879-1936)

Yishun is named after Lim Nee Soon who was known as 'Rubber and Pineapple King' for making his riches from these crops. Many of his plantations were located where Yishun and Sembawang are today. Born in Singapore, Lim Nee Soon was a community leader and philanthropist. He supported the revolutionary cause in China and was a close friend of Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925). Lim Nee Soon's fortunes fell during the Great Depression in the 1930s and he passed away while visiting China in 1936. He was buried in Nanjing, near Sun Yat-Sen's Mausoleum.

» Did You Know?

Yishun is the Mandarin pronunciation of Lim Nee Soon's name, and Nee Soon is the Teochew version. In 1980, Yishun became the official name for the new town.



Proceed to Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, just across Yishun Central 1

90 Yishun Central Khoo Teck Puat Hospital



Before Khoo Teck Puat Hospital opened in 2010, the nearest government hospital for residents living in Yishun and Sembawang was Tan Tock Seng Hospital at Jalan Tan Tock Seng. The opening of Khoo Teck Puat Hospital marked a milestone in the history of healthcare in this area.

Khoo Teck Puat Hospital is managed by the healthcare cluster Alexandra Health, which moved over from Alexandra Hospital to the new premises in 2010. Alexandra Hospital continues to run under another healthcare team.

Yishun was chosen as the site for the new hospital due to its central location for residents in the north, as the town is located between Sengkang and Woodlands. It is also well-connected to the rest of Singapore by transport infrastructure, and the surrounding vacant land makes future expansion possible.

Situated near the Yishun Pond, the hospital is designed to be 'green' in several ways. Landscaping throughout the hospital provides a healing environment for patients and helps to reduce heat and humidity.

The building also has environmentally-friendly features which reduce energy usage by as much as 35.9% as compared to standard hospitals. Sunshades over windows cut down glare while re-directing the light to the ceilings to brighten up rooms. Fans in public areas are powered by solar panels.

This 550-bed hospital is also designed to be patient-friendly. For example, the distance from the drop-off point in the main lobby to the Acute and Emergency Care Centre is only approximately 30 metres.



Khoo Teck Puat, 1986

(SOURCE: THE STRAITS TIMES © SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDINGS LIMITED, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION)

Khoo Teck Puat (1917-2004)

The hospital is named after billionaire, Khoo Teck Puat, whose foundation donated \$125 million towards the cause. Philanthropist, banker and hotelier, Khoo Teck Puat was born in Malaysia in 1917 and started out as a clerk in the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation when he was only 16. He became its deputy general manager before leaving in 1959. He found the Malayan Banking Berhad (known as Maybank today) in 1960 and went on to build his business empire in the banking and hotel industries. In 1981, he set up the Khoo Foundation, a legacy which continues to benefit numerous social welfare and educational causes in Singapore.

» Did you know?

Before the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital was built, Yishun Polyclinic, established in 1998, was the main healthcare provider in Yishun and Sembawang. Prior to that, residents had to rely on private general practitioners in their neighbourhoods and government dispensaries in Sembawang and Mandai. There used to be a hospital in Sembawang, called Sembawang Hospital, which was converted from a military hospital in the Naval Base. This hospital closed down in 1983 as it was too small and the facilities were limited.



Cross over to Yishun 10, located along 51 Yishun Central 1.

51 Yishun Central 1 Yishun 10



When Yishun 10 opened in 1992, it revolutionised the cinema industry in Singapore. Back then, nobody believed that a cinema with ten movie auditoriums could work, especially in the heartlands.

By the end of 1993, the \$37 million, 2,552-seat Yishun 10, Asia's first Cineplex, a movie theatre with several auditoriums, had proven all critics wrong after clocking more than three million visitors since the day it opened!

Yishun 10 was the brainchild of Golden Village, a joint venture between Hong Kong company Golden Harvest and Australian company Village Roadshow. For Golden Village, Yishun, with its large population, was a strategic location. It was accessible via MRT and buses, and parking was available.

Before Yishun 10 came into the picture, cinemas were usually built with one or two halls, and screening times were limited. Yishun 10 had ten auditoriums screening different shows concurrently, which meant that visitors

had more choices. This changed the way people perceived cinemas. With Yishun 10, cinemas became lifestyle destinations where people flocked to see if there were more than one movie to catch!

That was not the only way Yishun 10 re-defined the industry. It pioneered trends, such as computerised ticketing systems, physically-challenged-friendly features and lush interior fittings such as carpets and ergonomic chairs. Besides these, other innovations, such as a single projection room stretching across all ten auditoriums to ensure efficient management of film projection, were implemented too. After Yishun 10, the cinema industry in Singapore and even the rest of Asia was never quite the same again!

"I was told to design the cinema so that it looked like a rocket ship which had landed in Yishun from outer space! So, when people came along the winding road round the back of the housing estates, they would see this big, neon-lit building and they would go 'Wow!'"

Mr. Geoff Malone, architect behind Yishun 10 (b. 1943)

"It was a strategic decision to go into Yishun. It was a location we definitely, definitely wanted. The plot was empty. We could have a standalone building, surrounded by dwellings and near the town. And it turned out to be a phenomenal success."

Mr. David Glass, Managing Director of Golden Village (b. 1946)

Northpoint Shopping Centre 930 Yishun Avenue 2

Opened in late 1992, Northpoint Shopping Centre was another milestone in Yishun's development. Up till then, residents here had to go to town if they were looking for upmarket shops. As Singapore's first major suburban shopping complex, Northpoint brought upmarket brands such as John Little and Cold Storage into the heartland of Yishun. For many residents then, it was just like having Orchard Road at their doorsteps! In 2008, renovation of Northpoint took off and another extension was built.

928 Laksa Blk 928 Yishun Central 1 #01-157

This popular laksa (spicy noodle dish) stall has been around since the 1990s. The owners, Mdm Tan Ngak Siok and her husband Mr Tan Cheng Chuah, have been staying in Yishun since 1985. Their laksa, based on a recipe developed by Mdm Tan, stands out for its thick, spicy gravy and the sambal (chilli paste).

» Did you know?

Yishun 10 was originally designed in blue and silver. However, after learning the Chinese saw blue as a colour for funerals, the management switched to using red and silver instead.



Walk along Yishun Avenue 2 and cross over to Chu Siang Tong Di, the next stop on this trail.

8 Yishun Ring Road Chu Siang Tong



CHU SIANG TONG **8 Yishun Ring Road**

This temple began in 1950 as a shrine housed in a *kampung* shed in Chye Kay Village. It was first called 'Five Tigers Temple', after its principal deities. In 1960, the temple relocated to 11 ½ milestone at Sembawang Road and was re-named Chu Siang Tong, meaning a place where believers gathered.

Registered in 1968, Chu Siang Tong has been involved in social work and has donated to the needy and aged. Due to redevelopment, the temple had to move once again in the 1980s. Chu Siang Tong purchased this piece of land at Yishun Ring Road together with another temple, Wah Sua Keng Temple. The current temple was completed in 1987. Today, the temple is noted for its charitable work, such as granting of bur-saries and educational funds to poor students and serving the elderly.

WAH SUA KENG TEMPLE **596 Yishun Ring Road**

Bah Soon Pah, formerly along Bah Soon Pah Road, was one of the places early Chinese migrants settled down in and formed communities. As conflicts were inevitable in a community, during the 1930s, the villagers in Bah Soon Pah proposed to build a temple which would assume the role of a mediator.

This proposal was supported by Lim Nee Soon, who owned rubber plantations at Bah Soon Pah. He donated \$100 and 1.5 acres of land for the temple. Completed in 1934, the

temple was named 'Wah Sua Temple' after Lim Nee Soon. 'Wah' was a character from Lim Nee Soon's other name, Wah Soon, and 'Sua' means 'hill' in Hokkien or Teochew. Traditionally, Chinese males would adopt another name when they came of age, or when they embarked on another phase in life.

Today, Lim Nee Soon is also remembered in the two couplets at the entrance of the temple. The first characters of the couplets make up 'Wah Soon'. The temple relocated here in 1987.

TEOCHEW MEMORIAL PARK

Formerly known as Guang De Shan or Kwong Teck Sua, this 6-acre memorial park is a significant place for the Teochew community. Many of the migrants who came here in the 1800s and 1900s were Teochew. The park used to be one of the many cemeteries owned by Teochew clan Ngee Ann Kongsi to bury its kinsmen. Over the years, many of these Teochew cemeteries were acquired by the government for redevelopment. The exhumed remains from these cemeteries are also housed here today.

Facing the gates of the park stands an obelisk erected in 1962. Round the back, four Chinese characters meaning 'Remember Our Ancestors' are engraved, exhorting visitors to remember early Teochew migrants. Another obelisk, dedicated to overseas Teochew pioneers, was erected in 1953.

In 1986, the park was refurbished and annual prayer ceremonies are held here to remember these pioneers.



Walk on to the temple on the left of Teochew Memorial Park.

561 Yishun Ring Road
**Chong Pang Combined
Temple**



Step into this building and you would see that it houses a number of temples under one roof. Many of these temples were from former Chinese kampungs (villages) in Sembawang and Yishun. The temples relocated here in 1995, after urbanisation. Here are some snapshots of the temples' rich history and culture.

**KEW ONG YAH TEMPLE AND
HONG SAN SEE TEMPLE**

This temple is made up of a few temples which were formerly located in Nee Soon, including Chan Chu Kang Tua Pek Kong Temple, Hong San See Temple and Kew Ong Yah Temple. These temples are believed to be established sometime in the mid-19th century. One of the temple's greatest prides is an intricately carved eighty-year old wooden sedan chair, used in temple celebrations during the ninth lunar month, when the birthdays of the Nine Emperor Gods are celebrated. During this festival, you can see the devotees holding a procession and sending the deities off at Sembawang beach. The urns representing the deities are carried to the beach, and offerings, together with a paper model of a boat, are burnt.

CHIN KONG RELIGION FOOK POON TONG

Formerly located in Chong Pang Village, Chin Kong Religion Temple's worshippers used to be mostly Hakkas. Chin Kong Religion began in 1862 during the Qing dynasty, and was well-known for its work in treating opium addicts and establishing treatment centres in China and Southeast Asia. At its peak, there were 34 Chin Kong Religion temples in Singapore. This temple was started in 1955, by a Chin Kong Religion missionary who came to Singapore in 1918. It moved here in 1993 and is one of the seven such temples remaining in Singapore.

HUA POH SIANG THG

When Teochew migrants came to Singapore, they brought along their religious beliefs from Swatow, China. One sect, which followed the teachings of Song Da Feng, an eminent Song Dynasty monk, strongly emphasised charity. Hwa Poh Siang Tng, which began as a shrine in an attap house, is one such sect. Though it can probably trace its history to the mid-1800s, the temple was only registered in 1947. The temple played an important role in the religious and social life of the village then, providing funeral services for the needy and acting as a place for villagers to socialise.

KWANG TEE TEMPLE

Started in 1975, this temple used to be located in a kampung known as Or Kio (Hokkien: Black Bridge) at Thomson Road, near where Singapore Island Country Club is today. The temple's origins reveal insights into Chinese folk beliefs. According to the temple trustees, the temple began when a family in the village sent the statue of its deity for restoration, informing the deity to return at a specific date and time. However, when the time came, the statue was not ready. In another part of the village, a villager went into a trance. After consultation, the villagers concluded that the deity was made homeless when its statue was not ready at the agreed time, and thus appeased the deity by promising to build a temple with a new statue for it.



*Chin Kong Religion Fook Poon Tong in 1961,
at Chong Pang Village.*

(COURTESY OF CHIN KONG RELIGION FOOK POON TONG)



Continue walking along Yishun Ring Road to Blk 111.

475 Yishun Ring Road

Nam Hong Siang Theon Temple & Nam Hong Siang Theon Free Medical Centre



Located along Yishun Ring Road, this free medical centre has been serving the community since 2001.

Run by the Nam Hong Welfare Service Society today, the centre was started by Nam Hong Siang Theon Temple, a temple which was established in the 1950s along Jalan Hikayat in Sembawang. 'Siang theon', literally 'charitable centres' in Teochew, originated in Swatow, China. These organisations, are peculiar to the Teochews and are institutions that merge cultural and religious beliefs with a mission of charity. Devotees follow a combination of Buddhist, Confucian and Taoist teachings and they worship deities who are usually well-known for their benevolence, such as Song Da Feng, an eminent Song Dynasty monk.

Nam Hong Siang Theon Temple was started by the Teochew community in Sembawang. In those days, many migrants here were poor and could not afford funeral rites for their deceased. The temple helped their devotees out by providing free funeral services.

Due to urbanisation, Nam Hong Siang Theon Temple moved to Yishun in 1984, sharing the site with two other temples, Seng Pang Tua Pek Kong Keng and Ho Peck San Temple. It was the first combined temple to be built in Yishun.

A columbarium and ancestral hall was built in Nam Hong Siang Theon Temple and the sale of the niches helped to raise funds for the temple

to do charitable acts to help the community. Nam Hong Siang Theon Free Medical Centre, situated across the road, was thus established in 2001 to provide free traditional Chinese medicinal treatment to the needy. Today, it serves more than 30,000 patients a year.

HO PECK SAN TEMPLE

Ho Peck San Temple was established in the early 1900s in Chye Kay Village in Sembawang by Chinese immigrants from Fujian province, China. These pioneers brought along with them a statue of their deity, Lord Qi, and incense ashes from their hometown's temple dedicated to the Trinity Rulers of Taoism.

These were first enshrined in an attap hut, which was later replaced by a new temple building in 1950. A permanent opera stage was constructed at around the same time and doubled up as a classroom for village children. The founders of the Temple also established two schools, one of them Lee Teck Public School, in Chye Kay Village. Today, you can still see the statue of the first deity on the temples altar. The Temple also has in its possession a handwritten set of divination lots which is more than 60 years old.

"He was a man dedicated to the cause of his fellow workers regardless of race or religion."

Lee Kuan Yew, then Prime Minister, in a tribute to Ahmad Ibrahim, 21 August 1962

Ahmad Ibrahim (1927-1962)

Born in Penang, Ahmad bin Ibrahim came to Singapore after World War II and joined the Naval Base Fire Department at Sembawang as a watchman operator. He led the formation of the Naval Base Labour Union and was Sembawang's representative in the Legislative Assembly in 1955. Subsequently, Ahmad bin Ibrahim joined the People's Action Party where he served as the Assistant Secretary-General. In 1961, he became the Minister for Labour during a time when strikes were common. He passed away on 21 August 1962 and was accorded a state funeral.



Walk down Yishun Avenue 5 to Sree Narayana Mission.

Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School 751 Yishun Avenue 7

As you walk along Yishun Ring Road, you would pass by this school, named after Ahmad bin Ibrahim, (1927-1962) one of Singapore's early political leaders. Established in Sembawang Hills Estate in 1963, it was then known as Ahmad Ibrahim Integrated Secondary School, and was the second integrated government secondary school in Singapore where both Chinese and English streams were adopted. The first was Bukit Panjang Government High School, established in 1960.

The school later moved to Upper Thomson Road in the same year before moving to its current location in 1985. Today, the school is well-known as Singapore's pilot school for the 'Open Education Programme' launched in 1967, where visually handicapped students study alongside mainstream students.

Yishun Neighbourhood 1 Chong Pang City



Characterised by its two Chinese-style gateways, Chong Pang City is the first neighbourhood centre in Yishun New Town. The name “Chong Pang” was taken from Chinese pioneer and businessman Lim Chong Pang (1904-1956) and there used to be a village called Chong Pang Village located near where Sembawang Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) Station is today.

When the centre was launched in 1984, most of the shopkeepers here were former residents from nearby villages. They formed the Chong Pang Merchants' Association later to meet mutual interests and provide support for each other.

In 1992, when Northpoint was opened, business at the neighbourhood centre declined by 20% or more. To meet the competition, the entrepreneurial shopkeepers decided to spruce up the centre, using their earnings combined with funds from the Town Council. Metal awnings were installed, concrete pavements were constructed, shop fronts were beautified and the two Chinese-style gateways were erected. These measures resulted in a more attractive shopping area and improved the business of the neighbourhood centre by almost 30%.

To top that, the Association decided to embark on a business and cultural exchange programme with China too. In 1994, Chong Pang City signed an agreement with the town of Xindu in Chengdu, China, to become sister towns. Cultural programmes such as bringing over arts performances from China and student exchange trips were carried out. As a mark of the friendship between the two cities, Chong Pang City presented Xindu with a statue of a Merlion. In return, Xindu presented a statue of a mother and baby panda as a gift. Look out for the statue when touring the neighbourhood centre!

“The mission is a well-known institution in Singapore. Since its establishment amidst humble surroundings 32 years ago, the mission has steadily expanded the range of its charitable and community services... Their work is indeed praiseworthy.”

Dr. Tony Tan, then Minister for Education, at the Sree Narayana Mission, 1 June 1980



Take bus 856, 858, 859 and alight two stops later along Sembawang Road. Turn left to Gambas Avenue.

SREE NARAYANA MISSION (SINGAPORE) 12 Yishun Avenue 5

Registered in 1948, Sree Narayana Mission is one of the most important legacies of the Malayalee community in Singapore. Its founders were mostly Malayalee workers who migrated from Kerala, South India, between the 1920s and 1960s, to work at the Naval Base in Sembawang.

The founders were deeply influenced by teachings of Sree Narayana Guru (1855-1928), which emphasise that humanity is universal and all humans should be treated with dignity regardless of race or religion. Despite their migrant roots, these Malayalee workers gathered funds from their community to start the mission in Sembawang in the 1940s. As it became more established, it began to undertake social and charitable work, such as giving education bursaries to residents from all races in Sembawang. A mission building was constructed in 1952 along West Hill Road (formerly located where Sembawang New Town is today). Dedicated to promoting understanding between different religions and cultures, it also regularly organised workshops, talks and symposiums on these topics.

In 1979, the mission converted a military hospital in the former Naval Base into a home for the destitute elderly and sick. As the facilities were limited, the home moved to the former Sembawang Hospital along Canberra Road in 1983. Due to redevelopment of Sembawang, the home later moved to Yishun. The current home along Yishun Avenue 5 was officially opened in 1994.

Today, Sree Narayana Mission continues to be active in serving the community by offering counselling services, financial aid, food relief and scholarships. It also runs a home for the aged here in Yishun and the Sree Narayana Mission Meranti Home @ Meranti Village at Buangkok Green for mentally burnt-out patients.

Gambas Avenue Sembawang Hot Spring



Walk along Gambas Avenue and look out for a path along the perimeter of the fence. Turn in and you will find the only hot spring in Singapore Island.

According to a newspaper article in 1908, this hot spring was discovered in 1908, by a Municipal ranger called W. A. B Goodall on the grounds owned by Chinese merchant Seah Eng Keong (b. 1873), son of pioneer Seah Liang Seah (1850-1925). Seah Eng Keong sent samples of the water, measured at 65°C, to analysts in Europe for testing. When the water was proven safe for drinking, Seah Eng Keong set up the Singapore Natural Mineral Hot Springs Company and sold the water under the brand 'Zombun'. For many years, Zombun was a popular table water in Singapore. The hot spring was named Seletar Hot Springs and touted as a tourist spot.

In 1921, Fraser and Neave Limited (F&N) bought over the company and sold the water under various brands. A modern bottling plant was built in 1933.

During the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945), the Japanese built thermal baths around the spring and the site became recreational grounds for their officers. In 1944, the spring was damaged during a bombing raid carried out by the Allied Forces. It was only in the 1960s that water gushed out in greater volumes again. In 1967, F&N built a new bottling plant, managed by its subsidiary, Semangat Ayer Limited. A spa complex was planned but never took off. The government acquired the land for military use in 1985 but allowed F&N to continue bottling the water for a few more years.

Initially, the government planned to expand the Sembawang Airbase and cover up the hot spring. However, in view of the local community's outcry and request to retain them, the government decided to keep them. In 2002, a small concrete base with standpipes channel-

ling the hot spring was built. Today, this is the only area opened to the public. Nowadays, you can still see many people coming from the neighbourhood or other parts of Singapore to check out the hot spring. Many believe in the healing properties of the water and some even believe that it can bring them good luck!

KAMPUNG JALAN MATA AYER

Up till 1983, there was a kampung (Malay: village) called Kampung Jalan Mata Ayer (Malay: spring), located nearby at Jalan Mata Ayer. It was first called Kampung Ayer Panas (Malay: Hot Water Village), after the hot springs. This



Kampung Jalan Mata Ayer, undated.
(SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)

kampung comprised some 250 villagers, many of them Javanese brought over as prisoners-of-war from Indonesia by Japanese forces during World War II. When the villagers settled here, they had trouble finding clean water. After some surveying, they finally managed to find a spring nearby, and the kampung was renamed to mark the occasion. In 1983, the kampung was resettled and most of the villagers moved to Yishun New Town.

» Did you know?

In the 1990s, it was common to see punters coming on weekends to bathe themselves with the water before they headed to the races! This was because it was believed that doing so would bring them luck.

“We started coming here since the 1990s, after reading about it in the papers. The water is good for the skin, and when my ankles hurt, I will come and soak my feet. The pain will go away.”

Mr. Chew Cheng Hoe (b. 1950) with his wife Mdm Ling Ai Lee (b. 1957), residents of Jurong East.



Head back to the bus stop you just came from, and take 856, 859 or 980. Alight in front of Sembawang Shopping Centre.

Sembawang Road

This road that you are travelling on is actually the oldest road in Yishun and Sembawang! Built sometime in the early 1850s, it used to be known as Seletar Road, before the lower stretch was renamed Thomson Road after the Government Surveyor, John Turnbull Thomson (1821-1884).

In 1939, it was officially announced that the stretch of road from the junction of Mandai Road and Seletar Road all the way up to the north would be renamed Sembawang Road. Apparently, the name 'Seletar Road' had caused confusion as the area where the former Singapore Naval Base and the British airbases were located was also referred to loosely as 'Seletar'.

It is unclear what the origins of the name 'Sembawang' are. In a map dated 1830, the river now known as Sungei Sembawang was labelled as River Tambuwang. Some sources have suggested that the name 'Sembawang' probably came from the name of a riverine plant, the Sembawang tree. (*mesua ferruginea*). This tree can be found in Carpark C1 in Sembawang Park.

Right up to the 1980s, this road was the only one linking this part of Singapore to town. In the 1800s and early 1900s, most residents living here had to travel by boats down Seletar River and other waterways to town instead!



This gate to Sembawang was built in 1953 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in the same year.
(SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)



Sembawang Road in 1967.
(COURTESY OF DEREK TAIT)



Present Sembawang Road

Story-telling streets

The road names around here are centred round the theme of story-telling in Malay culture. Here are just some of these names:

- » **Sembong Road:** After *sembang*, which means 'to chat' in Malay.
- » **Jalan Salang:** 'Salang' is the action of driving a *keris* (Malay dagger) from the collarbone to the heart. This is an element of a good story.
- » **Jalan Shaer:** A quatrain of four lines with a rhyme
- » **Jalan Cherpen:** A short story
- » **Jalan Hikayat:** A legend
- » **Jalan Sajak:** A poem

CHYE LYE FISH HEAD CURRY

#01 Jalan Legundi

Drop by this coffee shop for a break. Serving up a wide range of seafood dishes, it is famous for its fish head curry and tofu prawn balls. On weekend evenings, you can see customers flocking here from all parts of Singapore, many of them former residents of Sembawang and Nee Soon. In 1967, the Wong family, who lived in Tanjong Pagar then, saw business opportunities when these shophouses were built. They bought a few units and ran a coffeeshop and a restaurant. Today, only the coffee shop is left, run by Mr. Wong Li Loon, who took over the shop from his father. Do take some time to explore the other shops in this area; many of them have interesting stories to tell too!



Walk down Jalan Jeruju to the next destination.

10B Jalan Jeruju
**Sembawang Presbyterian
Church**



"We were very poor when we were young. There were fifteen children in my family. As a farmer, my father saved enough to open a butcher stall, followed by a provisions store. He also collected trash from the British forces in Jalan Kayu Camp for a fee. Later he bought land at low prices and went into construction and property development. My father was a very compassionate man. He built schools, churches and often gave money to the poor and needy. But he was strict towards himself and us. He would not let us waste anything. He always lectured us, 'Kun kiam kut lat ko lao sip' (Hokkien: diligence, thriftiness, hard work, honesty). These words formed the basis of our lives."

Lawrence Ang (b, 1940), eldest son in the family, who is also active in philanthropy today.



Ang Oon Hue, undated
(COURTESY OF LAWRENCE ANG)

Turn into Jalan Jeruju from Sembawang Road and you will see this church, which stands out with its blue façade.

Founded in 1974 by the Presbyterian Christian community in Sembawang, this church was built on land donated by one of their church elders, Mr. Ang Oon Hue. Up to the 1980s, the church was still surrounded by old rubber trees as the site used to be a rubber plantation. The early worshippers were villagers from nearby kampungs, and the church served as a spiritual as well as social centre for them.

It was only in 1990 that the church was officially registered. In 2005, the church underwent re-development and the new building was completed in 2006. Today, its most outstanding feature is the bell tower. The bells were imported from France and are sounded at noon everyday to remind its worshippers to reflect on religious teachings.

ANG OON HUE (1910-1998)

Ang Oon Hue migrated from Nan An County, China, at the age of 19 and settled at Jalan Kayu to work as a farmer. Despite having received only a primary education, Ang Oon Hue went on to make his fortunes through investments in land and property. He brought about development to areas such as Jalan Kayu and Sembawang. Most of the shophouses along Jalan Kayu today were built by him.

Ang Oon Hue was known to be generous to the needy, and often provided financial aid. In 1940, he donated land and funds to build Ju Eng Public School (Juying Primary School today) along Jalan Kayu. He was respected as a community leader in Jalan Kayu, Yio Chu Kang, Sembawang and Punggol. In 1966, he received the Public Service Star for his contributions to the community. Today, his legacy includes the Ju Eng Home for Senior Citizens and several churches in Singapore.

» Did you know?

Sembawang Shopping Centre was also developed by Ang Oon Hue. Opened in 1986, it was the biggest mall in the north in its time. The \$25 million mall was popular with residents in the north, especially those staying in villages nearby. By the early 1990s, however, business began declining due to the opening of Northpoint Shopping Centre. The mall went for a makeover in 2004 and received a new lease of life. In 2005, the Ang family sold the mall to CapitalMalls Trust. Besides Sembawang Shopping Centre, many of the shophouses, terrace houses and the former market in this area were also built by Ang Oon Hue.



Head back to the bus stop you just came from, and take Service Number 856. Alight three stops later at Old Nelson Road.

345 Old Nelson Road
Old Admiralty House



Take a stroll up the hill along Old Nelson Road to the only national monument in Sembawang and Yishun, the Old Admiralty House.

Did you know that this stately house was renamed several times throughout its existence? When it was built in 1939 by His Majesty's Navy Works Department of the British Royal Navy, it was called Canberra House. The Singapore Naval Base extended from here to Sembawang's coast, and this house served as the accommodation for the Commodore Superintendent of the Royal Navy Dockyard.

Before Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942, Canberra House was the strategic planning headquarters of the British armed forces. After the war, it was renamed Nelson House, possibly after H.M.S. Nelson, a British battleship which arrived in Singapore in 1945 during the surrender of the Japanese forces.

In 1958, the house was again renamed, this time as Admiralty House. It served as the residence for the Commander of the Far East Fleet till the withdrawal of British forces from Singapore in 1971.

Upon the withdrawal, ANZUK, a tripartite force by Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, was formed to defend the Asia Pacific region as part of the Five Power Defence Arrangement. From 1971 to 1974, Admiralty House became known as ANZUK House as it was occupied by the tripartite military forces, which disbanded in 1974.

1974 also marked the house's departure from its military past. The Sembawang Shipyard took over the house in that year and turned it into a recreational club. From 1991 onwards, it was managed by a number of operators as a country club.

The house was gazetted as a national monument in 2002 and renamed Old Admiralty House, the name it is known by today. Designed in the architectural style of the Arts and Crafts movement, popular in the late 19th century, the house resembles a traditional English cottage. As the layout is asymmetrical, visitors have to change directions several times in order to find the main rooms.

» Did you know?

The swimming pool at the house was built after World War II by Japanese prisoners-of-war.



Walk down the hill and make your way to Canberra Road. Cross the road and take bus 856 and alight three stops later.

1 Admiralty Lane
Masjid Assyafaah



With its iconic minaret and stunning façade, this is the most outstanding landmark along Canberra Road. Built in 2004, Masjid Assyafaah has won accolades for its architecture.



When a local company, Forum Architects, took on the project, they wanted the design to fit into a multi-racial and multi-religious community. At the same time, the building had to stand out as a mosque so that Muslims could recognise it. The result was an architecturally contemporary mosque which used space creatively while integrating traditional Islamic symbols.

The first thing most people notice about the mosque is the ten-storey minaret, made of rusted metal plates for its natural tones. At night, the minaret ‘disappears’, leaving the lit crescent and star symbol to hover over the mosque.

Another feature is the re-interpretation of the arabesque, a traditional symbol in Islamic art. Arabesque screens create an interesting play of light and shadows while ensuring ventilation. The carpet, too, is designed with arabesque motifs. These are just some of the distinctive design features in the building. What makes the mosque even more interesting is that the history of the Muslim community here goes back to the 1920s.

Masjid Assyafaah originates from two older mosques in Sembawang; the Masjid Jumah Sembawang and Masjid Naval Base. Masjid Jumah Sembawang was established in the 1920s by Indian Muslim migrants who came here to work in the Naval Base. It was a well-known landmark along Sembawang Road before it was demolished in 1995.

Masjid Naval Base began as a *surau* (Malay: small prayer house) for Muslim naval dockyard personnel. As the Muslim community grew larger, the *surau* could no longer meet their needs. In 1968, Masjid Naval Base was built with the support of the British and officially opened by Commodore F. C. W. Lawson. The mosque, located at the junction of Canberra Road and Delhi Road (now defunct) became open to the public in 1972, after the British withdrawal. It was demolished in the mid-2000s, after Masjid Assyafaah was built.

“Before the mosque in the Naval Base was built, we had what we call in Malay, a surau. That was the place we would go to for prayers, Block 60 in the Naval Base. After the prayers, the Muslim community would stay and chit-chat.”

Mr. Abdul Aziz, who started attending the Masjid Naval Base in 1972.



Cross over the road and take bus 856. Alight two stops later at Sembawang New Town.

Sembawang New Town



*Top: Former colonial quarters in Sembawang Park, 2010.
Below: A junction at Chong Pang Road with fruit stalls in the background, Chong Pang Village, 1968.*
(COURTESY OF DEREK TAIT)

On the left side of Canberra Road, you can see Sembawang New Town. Planning and construction of the town began in the mid-1990s and by the early 2000s, this new satellite town had become a bustling community.

Sembawang New Town's development took place in a remarkably short time. The housing blocks began coming up in 1995 and in 1996, the Sembawang MRT station was opened. By early 1998, the shopping centre next to the train station, Sun Plaza, was already opened.

Did you know that the design of housing blocks in Sembawang New Town was inspired by colonial architecture? Around the area, there are British housing quarters and bungalows with architectural elements such as exposed brick faces and arches. Look around the new housing blocks and see if you can spot these features!

FORMER CHONG PANG VILLAGE

The former Chong Pang Village used to stand near where Sembawang MRT Station is today. The village was started in the 1930s by Chinese businessman, Lim Chong Pang (1904-1956). The establishment of the Naval Base had attracted many migrants from India. Housing was insufficient and Lim Chong Pang built huts in his family's rubber estate along Sembawang Road to lease to the migrants. Over time, the population grew steadily. In the 1950s, many Chinese families moved in from Paya Lebar as the land there was acquired by the government to build an airport.

Initially, the village was called Westhill Village, after the rubber plantation, Westhill Estate. The British government renamed it Chong Pang Village in 1956, as a tribute to Lim Chong Pang's public service.

Chong Pang Village was one of the two main villages in the north during its time. Businesses were established to serve the British forces stationed nearby. Schools, places of worship and even a theatre were built. The village began declining in the mid-1980s with urbanisation and the villagers were resettled in 1989.

» *Did you know?*

Sultan Theatre, built in 1939 by Lim Chong Pang, was a major landmark in Chong Pang Village. The theatre screened films of various languages to cater to the multi-cultural community then. Lim Chong Pang also owned another cinema called Seletar Talkies at Nee Soon Village, at the junction of Sembawang Road and Mandai Road. This cinema was later bought over by another Chinese businessman who renamed it Nee Soon Cinema. Both cinemas closed down in the 1980s due to dwindling ticket sales.



Lim Chong Pang, circa 1940s.
(SOURCE: HERBIE LIM ENG KUAN COLLECTION, COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)

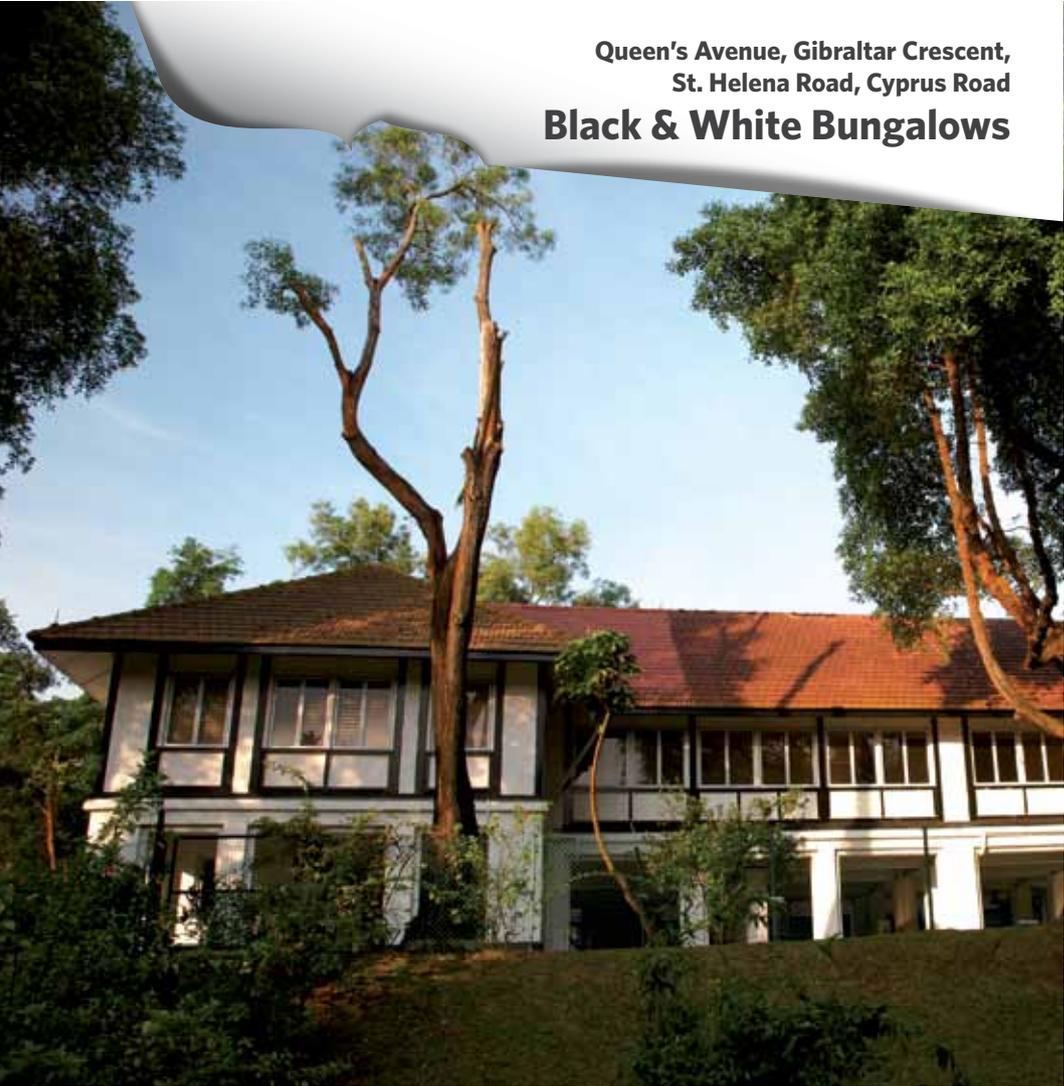
» *Lim Chong Pang (1904-1956)*

Movie magnate and prominent businessman, Lim Chong Pang, son of pioneer Lim Nee Soon, was also known for his public service. He established the South-East Asia Film Company in 1945 and brought in many new movies during a time when they were a great novelty. Besides the entertainment industry, he also had businesses in real estate and property development. He served on the Rural Board for nine years and was made a Justice of the Peace.



Make your way to Sembawang Bus Interchange, right next to Sembawang MRT Station. Take bus 882 and alight seven stops later, after Sembawang Community Centre.

Queen's Avenue, Gibraltar Crescent,
St. Helena Road, Cyprus Road
Black & White Bungalows



Turn into Admiralty Road East from Sembawang Road and explore the area from Queen's Avenue to Gibraltar Crescent. Along these roads are bungalows dating from colonial times.

"I've always lived in this area; my father used to work in the Sembawang Shipyard. Since I was a boy, I had joined the scouts, which was run by the British then. Today, I'm still involved with Terror Sea Scout and we organise camps and adventure courses for young scouts here!"

Mr. Silver Rajoo, who grew up in Sembawang and now lives along Canberra Road.

» **Did you know?**

The Fleet Shore Accommodation for military personnel of the Royal Navy was commissioned as H.M.S. Terror after the first Base Ship in Singapore. H.M.S. Terror was based here from 1933 to 1940. Today, the name 'Terror' is used by Terror Sea Scout and Terror Club at Wellington Road.

Coined 'black and white' after their painted black timber frames and white walls, these bungalows were built by the British from the 1920s onwards to house their personnel working in the Naval Base and other military installations nearby. They constitute the bulk of bungalows built during the last phase of the black and white architectural style, which flourished from the 1900s to the 1930s in Singapore.

The term 'bungalow' actually came from the Bengali word 'bangala', which refers to houses built in the Bengali style. When the British colonised Bengal in 1700s, they picked up the idea of adapting bangalas, or Bengali-styled houses, to design dwellings which were suited for tropical climate and heat. Thus, the Anglo-Indian bungalow with its characteristic verandas and overhanging eaves was created. This style was brought to Singapore by the British.

As you walk around, observe how these bungalows are adapted to create a cooler living environment. Overhanging eaves and verandahs reduce glare from the sun. The houses also have high roofs combined with lateral vents to improve ventilation.

**ST. ANDREW'S COMMUNITY CHAPEL
(RESTRICTED ACCESS)**

488 Pakistan Road

Look out for this chapel along Admiralty East Road before you turn into Queen's Avenue. Built in 1963 by the British Royal Navy, the chapel was the place of worship for British military personnel and their families. After the British withdrew in the 1970s, it served locals and foreign military personnel stationed nearby. In 1991, the chapel was renamed St. Andrew's Community Chapel.

TERROR SEA SCOUT

St. Helena Road

Round the bend at St. Helena Road, you can see the Terror Sea Scout. This building was part of the complex built by the Naval Base, and was formerly used for making sails. Since 1972, it has been occupied by the Terror Sea Scout Group, under the Singapore Scout Association.



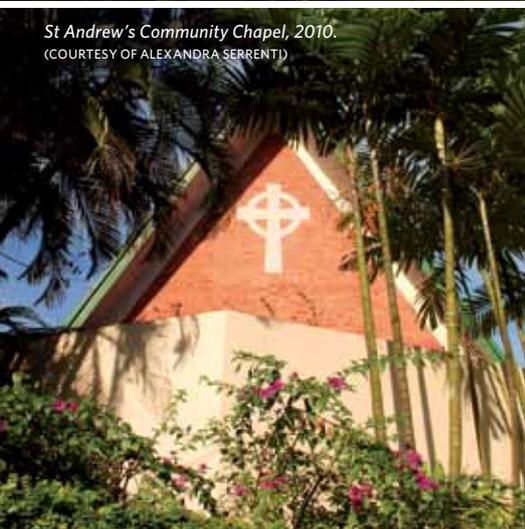
Bunker built by the British, 2010.
(COURTESY OF ALEXANDRA SERRENTI)

» **Look out!**

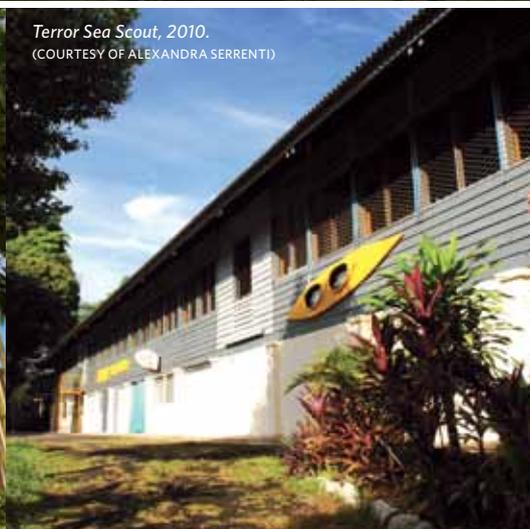
Along Gibraltar Crescent, there is a concrete bunker engulfed by a banyan tree. This bunker was built by the British to shelter residents in case of bombing raids. Around the Sembawang area, you can find quite a number of such bunkers.



Walk through Sembawang Park to the very end.



St Andrew's Community Chapel, 2010.
(COURTESY OF ALEXANDRA SERRENTI)



Terror Sea Scout, 2010.
(COURTESY OF ALEXANDRA SERRENTI)

60 Admiralty Road West
Sembawang Shipyard



Aerial view of Sembawang Shipyard, 2008
(COURTESY OF SEMBAWANG SHIPYARD PTE LTD, A SUBSIDIARY OF SEMBCORP MARINE LTD)



Sembawang Shipyard, 1971
(SOURCE: MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS COLLECTION, COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)

Right at the end of Sembawang Park, you can see ships berthed at the Sembawang Shipyard. The shipyard was established on 19 June 1968. Prior to that, it was part of an extensive naval base known as Singapore Naval Base, which was built by the British in the 1920s. When the British began to withdraw their troops in 1968, the base was handed over to the Singapore Government for a token sum of \$1. Sembawang Shipyard was thus set up to undertake commercial ship repair.

In the 1970s, the shipyard focused on training locals to take over duties from expatriate staff, developing a safe working environment and improving its facilities so that it could handle bigger ships. By the 1980s, the shipyard was one of the most established shipyards in the region. Its floating dock, which was launched in 1981, was the biggest in Asia during its time.

The 1990s saw further growth and expansion of the shipyard's facilities and Sembawang Shipyard became known as the premier shipyard in Asia for the repair and conversion of cruise ships. It was also the decade when Sembawang Shipyard began to enter joint ventures to establish shipyards overseas, namely in China and Indonesia. Today, Sembawang Shipyard continues to be one of the most premier shipyards in the region with a reputation as a specialist in niche services such as upgrading and conversion of passenger ships and repairing of naval ships.

FORMER SINGAPORE NAVAL BASE

The former Singapore Naval Base built by the British in the 1920s used to stretch all the way from Sembawang Road to the Causeway at Woodlands. The base, which took more than 10 years to build, was established to defend Britain's interests in Asia Pacific.

Sembawang was the site where the most intensive military build-up took place under British rule. The Singapore Naval Base came equipped with facilities such as barracks, workshops and hospitals. When the graving dock of the base was officially opened in 1938, it was the biggest naval dock in the world then. Other military facilities such as the airbases at Sembawang and Seletar and garrison barracks in Nee Soon were also built to provide air and land support to the base. The build-up was so impressive that Singapore was known as the "Gibraltar of the East" as the defences seemed impregnable.

The establishment of Singapore Naval Base and its supporting military facilities also led to development in northern Singapore. Businesses such as bars, laundry services and motor workshops were set up to cater to the servicemen staying in the base. The base was also effectively a self-sustaining town, with shops, schools and even theatres within its boundaries. Large numbers of workers were also needed to keep the base running and many people from India, Indonesia and other parts of Singapore flocked here in search of work. As they settled down, they formed communities which legacies are still found in parts of Sembawang and Yishun today.



The Naval Base also brought about development to the area, and businesses such as Nelson Bar in Sembawang flourished, 1970.
(COURTESY OF DEREK TAIT)

117 Beaulieu Road
Beaulieu House



Right at the end of Sembawang Park, there stands a bungalow. Little is known about its origins other than it was built as a seaside retreat probably around the 1910s by a family of the surname David.

When construction of the Singapore Naval Base began in the 1920s, the house was acquired by the British colonial government. It became the residence for senior engineers when the base was being built, and was later occupied by senior naval officers. For two years, from 1940 to 1942, Admiral Geoffrey Layton (1884-1964), who was the Commander-in-Chief for Britain's China station then, stayed at the house. After World War II (1939-1945), the house was occupied by Senior Fleet Officers.

It is not known when or why the building was named Beaulieu house. Beaulieu is the name of a number of sites in England and it is likely that the name is taken from one of them. The house stands out with its use of Victorian-styled iron work and Neo-Classical plaster details. On 8 April 2005, Beaulieu House was granted conservation status by the Urban Redevelopment Authority. Today, it is occupied by a restaurant.

SEMBAWANG PARK
343 Sembawang Road

This park has one of the last few natural beaches in Singapore and is popular with families and camping groups. It is also a favourite spot for bird-watchers. You can spot birds such as eagles, kites, kingfishers and orioles. See if you can catch sight of the White-bellied Sea Eagle!

The park also has strong links with history as it was part of the Naval Base. The Sembawang jetty in front of Beaulieu House was built by the British in the 1940s and completed by the Japanese during their occupation (1942-1945). The walkways in the park today are restored from former paths laid by the British. At the end of Sembawang Road, you can find the remains of the former Seletar Pier, which has been in existence since the early 1920s. In the past, when land transport was not well-developed, this pier served those who had to travel by boat to get to the town. The pier's structure extending out to sea was cleared away by the 1980s.



» Did you know?

Many of those who worked in the Naval Base stayed in the base as well. The community then was rather diverse! Mr. Abdul Aziz, who grew up in the base, recalled, "My father was working as a driver for the British in the Naval Base. I grew up in Block 61, near Canberra Road. Most of my neighbours were Indians, and they were very friendly. There were Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Chinese. Everybody spoke Malay at that time, and it was there that I learnt how to speak Tamil!"

The Navy Connection

Most of the street names here are related to the Royal Navy.

» After Royal Navy dockyards:
Gibraltar Crescent and Malta Crescent

» Streets named after British warships:
Durban Road and Kenya Crescent

» Streets named after Admirals:
Cochrane Crescent and Drake Avenue (defunct)

» Streets named after Commonwealth cities:
Canada, Cyprus, Wellington, Montreal and Canberra Roads.



Walk down Sembawang Road and turn into Andrews Avenue till you reach Jalan Mempurong.

27B Jalan Mempurong
**Masjid Petempatan
Melayu Sembawang**



Set in a secondary forest, this mosque along Jalan Mempurong was completed in 1963 as a place of worship for the Malay Muslims staying in Sembawang.

Before the mosque was built, Muslims living in kampungs nearby had to pray at *suraus* (Malay: small prayer house) or at the former Masjid Jumah Sembawang along Sembawang Road. In the early 1960s, funds were raised to build a mosque here. One of the biggest contributions came from Lee Foundation, which donated \$10,000. When the mosque was completed, it was named Masjid Kampung Tengah, after the kampung it was located in.

In 1960, the area along the coast was populated by the Malay community. This area was known as the Malay Settlement or 'Petempatan Melayu Sembawang'. The mosque was later renamed after the settlement as Masjid Petempatan Melayu Sembawang. For many years, it served as the social and religious centre of neighbouring Malay kampungs. Important rituals were carried out here, such as the *cukur rambut* (Malay: shaving of newborns' hair) and weddings.

Extensive renovation works were carried out in 1984 and further upgrading was undertaken in 2007 for eight months before it re-opened in April 2008. Near the entrance, a tall rubber tree stands, the last one remaining from former rubber plantations here. Residents believed that there is a resident spirit in the tree as attempts to fell the tree have failed.

MALAY KAMPUNGS

Along the coast, there used to be Malay kampungs such as Kampung Lobang Bom, Kampung Tanjong Irau and Kampung Tengah.

Another well-known village, Kampung Wak Hassan, pre-dated the Naval Base. It was founded in 1914, by a Malay named Wak Hassan bin Ali, who worked at the former police post at the mouth of Sungei Sembawang. He acquired the rights to the land stretching from the river to Westhill Estate and planted cash crops such as coconuts. When the British took over the land for the Naval Base, the kampung was moved to where Kampung Wak Hassan is today, at the former Seletar Pier. All the Malay villages were demolished during the 1980s and 1990s to make way for development. Kampung Wak Hassan, cleared in 1998, was the last kampung to go.

BOTTLE TREE VILLAGE

60 Jalan Mempurong

This 9,000 m² concept village by the seaside is well-known for its bottle trees which were specially imported from Australia. Two of the bottle trees are over 100 years old and cost about \$30,000 each. Opened in 2004, the village comprises a seafood restaurant and recreational facilities.

1036 LIVE SEAFOOD

1036 Sembawang Road

Located in a shophouse along Sembawang Road, this is one of the most popular seafood eateries in Yishun and Sembawang. Established in the 1990s by owner Mr. Lim Lai Soon, 1036 Live Seafood is best known for its reasonably-priced Lobster Mee Hoon, Herbal Drunken Prawns and Clear Clams Soup in Cantonese Style.

Of Fish and Plants

Most of the streets here are named after the Malay terms for common fish and plants found in Sembawang.

Streets named after fish

- » **Jalan Mempurong:** Herring
- » **Jalan Selimang:** Barb
- » **Jalan Inggau:** Tomato clownfish, the orange coral fish.
- » **Kerong Walk and Lane:** Crescent perch

Streets named after plants

- » **Jalan Janggus:** Cashew nut tree.
- » **Jalan Kandis:** Wild mangosteen
- » **Jalan Machang:** Horse mango, which tastes similar to the mango
- » **Jalan Sankam:** From 'saka', a kind of turmeric plant.
- » **Jalan Kerayong:** A tree known for its bark which has medicinal properties
- » **Jalan Basong:** A tree which latex is used for sores and skin ailments, and the plant is also good for lowering fever and expelling parasites from the intestines.



Head back to Sembawang Park and take bus 882. Alight five stops later and walk down Canberra Link to Yishun Industrial Park A. Alternatively, you can take a leisurely walk along the Simpang Kiri Park Connector!

10 Yishun Industrial Park A Holy Tree Sri Bala Subramaniam Temple



Right at the edge of Yishun Industrial Park A, you will see the Holy Tree Sri Bala Subramaniam Temple. This temple began as a shrine in the Singapore Naval Base.

In April 1962, on the eve of Ponggal (Hindu harvest festival), a Hindu naval worker by the name of P. Karupiah had a dream about Hindu deity, Lord Muruga, and a golden cobra under an elantha (jujube) tree. Upon waking, he found the tree of his dream near Canberra Road, with an anthill under it. Interpreting it as a divine sign, he built an altar and placed a spear and pictures of several Hindu deities, including Lord Muruga, below the tree.

Hindu workers at the Naval Base began worshipping at the shrine. Upon appeal by the devotees, the British granted the land for religious use. In 1964, the shrine was officially registered as Punithamaram Sree Balasubramaniam Temple and a temple was built. 'Punithamaram' means 'Holy Tree', in reference to the elantha tree, and 'Sree Balasubramaniam' is another name of Lord Muruga. The Hindu community raised funds for the temple's construction, and the British contributed building materials and support in logistics.

The temple soon became the spiritual and community centre for Hindus living in Sembawang. Marriages and naming ceremonies for new-borns were held here. The temple also organised activities such as devotional singing classes.

In the 1990s, the temple had to relocate to make way for Sembawang New Town. It moved to Yishun Industrial Park in 1996 and the new temple building was consecrated in 1999. Today, it is registered as Holy Tree Sri Bala Subramaniam Temple.

INDIAN COMMUNITIES IN SEMBAWANG

The establishment of the Singapore Naval Base in the 1920s saw an influx of Indian migrants, many of whom came as naval workers. The Indians comprised three main communities - the Telugus, Malayalees and Tamils. These communities brought along their cultures to this area.

The Malayalees, who came from Kerala, made up the majority. Organisations which propagate Malayalam culture, such as the Singapore Kathakali Yogam, a dance society, and the Naval Base Library where Malayalam works were made available, were set up. The Malayalam community was so vibrant that Sembawang was nicknamed 'Little Kerala'. Many Malayalees returned to India after the British handed over the Naval Base in 1968.

"Cultural shows were put up during Malayalam festivals like Onam. There were fashion shows with parades of traditional Kerala costumes worn by men and women...The people in Sembawang enjoyed these cultural shows."

Mr. Ramachandran Padmanabhan, a Malayalee who came to Singapore in 1953 (SOURCE: ORAL HISTORY CENTRE, COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)

» Did you know?

This is one of the few temples in Singapore which celebrate the Panguni Uthiram festival. The festival marks the marriages of several important Hindu deities, including that of Lord Muruga. The temple celebrated Panguni Uthiram for the first time in 1967. This festival, which takes place during March or April, is marked by a procession of *kavadi* (Tamil: a structure carried on the back) bearers.



A kavadi bearer during a celebration of Panguni Uthiram at the Naval Base, 1970. (SOURCE: THE STRAITS TIMES © SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDINGS LIMITED. REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.)



Walk straight ahead to the end of Yishun Industrial Park A.

527 Yishun Industrial Park A
Hwee San Temple



“We were known as a village where almost everyone had the same surname ‘Phua’. There were only four other families of different surnames. People could easily identify us by our accents when we speak Hokkien. Upon hearing us, they would go, “You must be a Phua!””

Mr. Phua Kin Hai (b. 1945), former resident of Phua Village.

When you reach the end of the industrial park, you will see a row of three temples. On the left is the temple of the Phua family, who migrated from Nan An County, China, in the late 1800s.

The first Phuas who migrated to Singapore brought along with them incense ash from their village temple in China as a form of protection for their families. These migrants first stayed at 7th milestone, Upper Thomson Road (near Ang Mo Kio today), and later Yio Chu Kang. In 1914, they moved to the area around the former Lorong Handalan (near present-day Springleaf) and Nee Soon Road, settling in a village called Heng Li Pah.

Heng Li Pah Village was named after a rubber plantation of the same name, but was commonly called “Phua Village” after the Phuas. When the Phuas settled down, they built a temple to house the ash, dedicating it to their patron deity, the Lord of the Phuas. It was named Hwee San temple, which meant ‘Temple on a horizontal mountain’ in Hokkien. This was derived from the Phuas’ family temple in China, which was built on a horizontal mountain plain.

The temple was the centre of village life. Villagers met there to socialise, resolve disputes and consult the deity on daily affairs. Single migrants stayed at the temple till they found shelter elsewhere. Temple funds were used to take care of the old and needy. Every ninth Lunar month, on the 27th and 28th days, the temple would celebrate the deity’s birthday. Former villagers recalled that festivities were grander than during Chinese New Year. Opera shows would be staged and feasts held.

Life in the village was simple. Most villagers were farmers. There was only one provision store and one bullock cart for transport during the early 1900s. The villagers established Xing Dun Primary School in 1936 and lessons were taught in Mandarin. By the 1970s, the village had begun declining as young members left to seek employment in other parts of Singapore. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the villagers were resettled in Yishun New Town and other estates in the north.

As for Hwee San Temple, it relocated to Yishun in 1997. Today, the Phuas still gather here to celebrate their festivals every ninth Lunar month.

LORD OF THE PHUAS

The temple’s patron deity, Lord of the Phuas, is Pan Ji Xun (1521-1595), a Ming Dynasty official who was in charge of river works. He improved the drainage of the Yellow River and its surroundings and the river became relatively stable for years. He was thus promoted to a ministerial post and made honorary tutor to the prince.



Walk to the next temple beside Hwee San Temple.

525 Yishun Industrial Park A
**Chee Hoon Sun Kong
And Cheow Leng Beo**



Unlike most other temples in Yishun and Sembawang, the temples in this combined temple, completed in 1997, did not originate from this area. Instead, one hails from Bukit Timah and the other from Jalan Besar.

At the entrance of this temple, you can see eight leaping carps mounted on the gates, and two dragons on the roof of the temple. This refers to the Chinese belief that carp transform into dragons when they leap over the Dragon's Gate, as temple gates are referred to. The carp's persistence is often represented by nine leaps. In front of the temple stand three pillars, each carved from a single block of granite. The pillars represent Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, which can be seen from the carvings.

CHEE HOON SUN KONG

Chee Hoon Sun Kong started as a shrine at Dairy Farm Road in Bukit Timah in 1963 and relocated to Yishun due to redevelopment. In this new temple, stone is used extensively as Chinese believe that gods dwell in caves. Its altar is carved from a single block of granite which weighs 17 tonnes. The temple is dedicated to the three schools of teachings in Chinese culture – Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Here, you can see the 24 Confucian filial pieties engraved on granite slabs.

CHEOW LENG BEO

This temple began as a small altar in the mid-1800s in the coolie quarters

for Henghua migrants from Jiangdou village, China. The quarters at Weld Road, Jalan Besar, was where new Henghua migrants stayed and received help when they first came to Singapore. These migrants from Jiangdou village are known for dominating the transport industry from rickshaws and bicycles to taxis and buses. The peak of their influence was in the 1970s, when the industry was almost entirely controlled by Jiangdou people.

According to temple records, the first two Jiangdou migrants came between 1862 and 1874. Most probably, they brought with them their deity, Liu Jin Shen Hou, for protection. As the coolies grew more affluent, they rented a shophouse at Weld Road to house the deities. Due to redevelopment in the 1990s, the temple moved first to Serangoon Road and later to Yishun.

This temple is also known as the Ong temple as Jiangdou people are of the surname 'Ong'. The temple observes some unusual practices, such as holding five-day retreats for male members during which the temple is closed off to visitors. Temple offerings are also unique to Henghua temples, such as large pastries made in the shape of a turtle.



» Did you know?

Traditionally, the characters making up Chinese names are determined by a set of couplets written by the respective family clan. The couplets contain several pairs of Chinese characters and every generation in the family is allocated a unique pair of characters for naming. When a child is born, the first character in the child's name (after the family name) is taken from the pair of characters. Upon marriage, this character is changed to its corresponding character in the pair to mark the coming of age. At Cheow Leng Beo's ancestral altar, you can see four name couplets of 19 characters each. These couplets are still used by the Ong clan today to name their descendents.



Move on to the last temple in the row of temples here.

523 Yishun Industrial Park A
**Hock Huat Keng Temple And
Sree Veeramuthu
Muneeswarar Temple**



The first thing that strikes you when you enter this building is that it houses a Chinese temple and Hindu temple under the same roof. The friendship between the two temples actually dates back to more than sixty years ago, in the Hup Choon Kek Village.

“Why was the temple built near the road? Because when villagers leave the village for work and they bring money back, they would first bring some offerings like chickens or ducks to thank Tua Pek Kong. The temple in the village was a place where you entrust yourself to the deities. When you leave the village in the morning, you ask for protection, and when you come back safely at night, you give thanks.”

Mr. Jimmy Ng (b. 1955), former resident of Tua Pek Kong Kow.

Hup Choon Kek Village, formerly located along Yio Chu Kang Road, was actually named after a shop of the same name owned by Chinese pineapple planter Tan Tye (1839-1898). In the village, there was a small temple dedicated to the Chinese deity, Tua Pek Kong. The temple, which stood at the entrance of the village from Yio Chu Kang Road, was named Tua Pek Kong Temple after the deity. The area was also known as Tua Pek Kong Kow, which means ‘Tua Pek Kong Entrance’ in Hokkien.

The story goes that this temple dates back to the mid-1800s, when a Chinese settler by the surname of Yio built a shrine along Seletar River. The shrine was later moved to Hup Choon Kek. Tua Pek Kong Temple was a landmark in the village and served as a social and religious centre. Its importance could be seen when a community centre, which opened here in the mid-1900s, was named after it.

The temple festivals, held twice yearly, drew devotees from villages all around. Snatching of food offerings was a common practice during the festivals, and sometimes, the food would be gone even before the rituals were completed! Worshippers believed that the more they snatched, the more blessings they would receive. After the celebrations, the villagers would cast lots for a turn to take the statues of the deities home, where they would remain till the next festival. The deities would be returned for the festival the following year for another round of balloting. In the temple itself, only a painting of Tua Pek Kong resided permanently.

Near the temple, the British had built quarters to house their Public Works Department workers, who were Indian. Sometime in the early 1900s, the Indians began worshipping the Hindu deity Sreemuneeswaran, who was represented by an unusual stone. The stone was placed right under a tree outside Tua Pek Kong Temple. Sreemuneeswaran is believed to be a protector deity who guards the safety of his worshippers and the boundaries of his territory. Similarly, Tua Pek Kong is said to be the guardian deity of Chinese migrants. Soon, the Chinese also began worshipping the Hindu deity, and a small shrine was constructed for it.

In the 1980s, Hup Choon Kek was slated for redevelopment. When the temple finally moved in 1996, it asked its old neighbour, the Hindu shrine, to move with it to Yishun, thus continuing an old friendship between two.

At the new premises, both temples continue to serve their devotees and help needy residents in the north of Singapore by distributing food rations yearly.



Walk out of the industrial park till you hit Yishun Avenue 2. Turn left and walk till you reach the next site.

950 Yishun Avenue 2
Masjid Darul Makmur



MASJID DARUL MAKMUR
950 Yishun Avenue 2

From afar, you can see the mosque standing out against Yishun Neighbourhood Park behind. Completed in 1987, this mosque was built at the initiative of the Muslim community in Yishun New Town.

When the new town started in the late 1970s, there were no mosques within the town itself. The nearest mosques were in Sembawang or along Upper Thomson Road. Prayers were therefore conducted at the void decks of housing estates or at home.

In 1983, the Muslim residents formed a committee to build a mosque and started a fund-raising campaign. Muslims who were staying in kampungs nearby, such as Kampung Tanjong Irau, also chipped in to help. After four years, the mosque was finally completed.

Today, the mosque is a religious and communal centre for Yishun's Muslim residents. Apart from its religious functions, it also plays a social role by providing educational and welfare programmes.

Cross over to Yishun Street 22 behind the mosque

**CHURCH OF OUR
LADY STAR OF THE SEA**
10 Yishun Street 22

The beginnings of this Catholic Church can be traced back to the first Catholic community in Yishun and Sembawang—the Catholic families who came to work and live in the Singapore Naval Base. Religious services were held in a makeshift building in the early days. After the end of World War II in 1945, the Catholic community was granted the use of a building located at Jalan Kedai, off Canberra Road. The building was formerly used as a school during the Japanese Occupation.

As the Catholic community grew in numbers, the need for a bigger church arose. In 1952, the church was declared unsafe by the British authorities, who advised the community to build a new church. A suitable plot of land at Jalan Sendudok, which was then part of the Naval Base, was secured for the purpose. A fund-raising campaign was carried out for the project and the new church building came to fruition in 1953 at a cost of \$53,000.

In 1987 the church was informed that it had to be relocated to make way for the development of Yishun and Sembawang. The present site at Yishun Street 22 was purchased in 1989 after a two-year search. The new church building, the design of which was inspired by a boat to signify the proximity to the sea in Sembawang and the close links the early church had with the British Naval Base, was completed in 1992 at a cost of \$4.7 million. Today, the church remains a vibrant centre for Catholics in this area.



Make your way to Yishun Ring Road and walk down to the Khatib Bongsu Park Connector. Stroll to the next destination, Yishun Park. Otherwise, take bus 804 and alight at the park.

CHONGFU PRIMARY SCHOOL
170 Yishun Avenue 6

Right behind the Church of Our Lady Star of the Sea is Chongfu Primary School. It was started in 1915 by the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan, to provide education to Chinese girls. Known as Chong Hock Girls' School then, the school along Telok Ayer Street conducted lessons in Hokkien till 1930, when Mandarin was adopted. As the number of students increased, the school expanded to Stanley Street in the same year.

In 1949, the school took in its first batch of male students. It became a government-aided school in 1957. As Singapore began to urbanise and the population residing in the town area was gradually resettled, the number of students decreased. In 1981, the school adopted the Romanised name of Chong Hock and was renamed Chongfu Primary School. It moved to Yishun New Town in 1985. With the relocation, the school also began taking in pupils of all races and revamped its curriculum.



Bounded by Yishun Central, Yishun Avenue 11,
Yishun Ring Road and Yishun Avenue 4

Yishun Park



Take a walk in this park and step into Yishun's past. Before the new town was built, this area used to be part of plantations belonging to a kampung called Chye Kay Village.

Most villagers worked on rubber plantations, fruit orchards and farms before they were evacuated in the 1980s. To keep a slice of former kampung days, the National Parks Board decided to retain the original trees and vegetation. This 17-hectare park, built at a cost of \$2.7million, was formally opened in 1995 by then Acting National Development Minister Lim Hng Kiang.

Today, almost 70% of the park is covered in original vegetation. Here, you can find all sorts of fruit trees planted by former villagers; rambutan, durian, jackfruit, banana and guava. At the north-eastern end, you can still see rubber trees from former plantations!

TAN CHYE KAY *(details of birth and death unknown)*

The former Chye Kay Village, which used to stretch from Sembawang Road to Sungei Khatib Bongsu, was named after Chinese pioneer Tan Chye Kay. Tan came to Singapore during the late 1800s when he was 18 years old to work in a gambier and pepper plantation near Mandai. Through hard work, he later became a rubber and pineapple plantation owner. He was well-respected as a community leader and played an important role in developing the village. For example, the former Lee Teck School was built on land he donated.

YISHUN TEMPLE ASSOCIATION

17 Yishun Avenue 9

Before reaching the park, you would have passed by this temple along Yishun Avenue 9. Completed in 1988, this temple combines a few temples formerly from kampungs in northern Singapore. One of them, Guan Loong Sheng Temple combined three temples from Bah Soon Pah Road. The first, Guan Shou Tan Temple, was founded in a village called Wu Fu Village, along where Yishun Avenue 11 is today, and shifted to Bah Soon Pah Road in the 1950s. The second temple, Xing Shen Tua Temple, was built in the 1970s in the Ong Lye Suah Village at Bah Soon Pah Road. The third temple, Long Xia Guan Temple, was started in the 1830s by Hokkiens from Anxi, China. These migrants first settled in Yio Chu Kang and moved a few times before finally settling down in Bah Soon Pah Road in 1963. All the temples moved to Yishun when Bah Soon Pah Road was redeveloped.

XISHAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

8 Yishun Street 21

Xishan Primary School was established in 1937, when a group of Chinese businessmen started Si San Public School to provide education for the Chinese living in Sembawang. 'Si San' means 'West Hill', and refers to the rubber plantation it was located in. Lessons were taught in Mandarin until 1985, when the government took over the running of the school and English was implemented as the teaching medium. In 1986, the school moved to Yishun and was renamed Xishan Primary School, according to the Hanyu Pinyin version of 'Si San'.



Hop onto a bus to Yishun Bus Interchange and take the train one stop down to Khatib MRT. Alternatively, you can walk down from the park to the next destination.

601 Yishun Ring Road
Gurdwara Sahib Yishun



Established in 1995, this Sikh temple along Yishun Ring Road is actually a merger of three older Sikh shrines. They are the Gurdwara Sahib Khalsa Sabha at Sembawang, Gurdwara Sahib Naval Police Sembawang and Gurdwara Sahib Jalan Kayu.

The Sikhs first settled in Sembawang in the 1920s and 1930s with the establishment of the Naval Base. Many of them worked in the Naval Police and as dockyard workers. As the Sikh community grew, they needed a Gurdwara (Sikh Temple) to fulfil their spiritual and welfare needs. In 1936, the Guru Khalsa Sabha was started in an attap hut at 13th milestone, Sembawang Road (Near the former Chong Pang Village). The Gurdwara Sahib Naval Police, was registered in 1960 by the Sikhs of the Naval Police Force. This Gurdwara later merged with Guru Khalsa Sabha in 1971, when the Naval Police Force was disbanded with the withdrawal of British military forces.

Over at Royal Air Force Seletar, there was also a Sikh community. Before World War II, there were a number of Sikhs serving in the Additional Police Force in the air base. The first Sikh shrine was established in the 1930s by Sikh police officers and housed within their barracks. When the Additional Police Force was dissolved in 1947, the community moved their shrine to an attap building in Jalan Kayu, and named it Gurdwara Sahib Jalan Kayu.

When the British withdrew their military forces in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many Sikhs moved out of Sembawang and Jalan Kayu to seek employment elsewhere. Some chose to return to India. Due to development in both areas in the 1990s, the temples had to be relocated. They finally merged to form Gurdwara Yishun in 1995.

YISHUN SPORTS AND RECREATION CENTRE
101 Yishun Avenue 1

Opened in 1992, this sports and recreation centre was the first stadium in Asia designed with a roof suspended by cables. In the early 1990s, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) began designing high-technology buildings in housing towns. This centre was one of them.

The architects considered the surroundings of the site when designing the stadium. With the residential blocks and the MRT viaduct nearby, it would feel like a concrete jungle if the centre was entirely solid. The use of cables to suspend the roof gave the building a sense of lightness. Its unique design also added on to Yishun's identity as a new town.



Lower Seletar Reservoir



In 1983, a dam was built across the mouth of Seletar River to create this scenic reservoir you see today. Known as 'Sungei Seletar Reservoir' then, it was renamed in 1992 as Lower Seletar Reservoir.

This reservoir is one of the last water sources to be developed in Singapore. Besides providing water to Singaporeans, the reservoir is also a place for recreation and community-building today. Come by during a weekend and you can usually see people kayaking or dragon-boating here!

SELETAR RIVER

The annals reported that in the early 15th century, the ruler of Singapore, Iskandar Shah, escaped to Muar via Seletar River from the invading Javanese. Most probably, the name came from this river, which was first mentioned in the 17th century work, *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals).

Seletar River played a crucial role in the development of this area. The first migrants here arrived via the river. Plantations were first established at the foot of the river and along it, before extending northwards. Businessmen used to ship their produce to the town by boat down Seletar River and round East Coast. Today Seletar River pours into two impounding reservoirs - Lower Seletar and Upper Seletar Reservoirs.

NAVAL BASE SECONDARY SCHOOL

901 Yishun Ring Road

Naval Base Secondary School was established in 1957, when the British set aside land in the Naval Base at the former Bah Tan Road to build a school. It was the first full school in the English medium in Singapore, with students from Primary One to Secondary Four. In those days, it was the only secondary school in Sembawang.

As the school was located within the Naval Base, security was tight. Teachers and workers had all ten fingers printed and photographs taken before they were issued entry passes. Students had to enter through the Canberra Gate, where police were on guard duty.

Due to development in Sembawang and the need for better facilities, the school finally moved to its current building in Yishun in 1988.



Canberra Gate, 1968.
(COURTESY OF DEREK TAIT)

PEIYING PRIMARY SCHOOL

651 Yishun Ring Road

Formerly known as Poi Eng Public School, this is one of the oldest schools in Yishun. It began in 1941, when two Chinese schools, Zang Hua School and Qi Zhi School merged to form Poi Eng Public School. Zang Hua School was formerly called Fa Chu School and was established by Lim Nee Soon in 1919 along Jalan Ulu Seletar.

The school was first located at Upper Thomson Road in an attap house. Funded by philanthropists and Chinese associations, the school provided primary education to children living in Nee Soon. In the 1980s, the school became a government school and relocated here in 1987.



Poi Eng Public School, circa 1950s.
(SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)

251 Yishun Avenue 3
**Sree Maha Mariamman
Temple**



Along Yishun Avenue 3, you can see one of the most outstanding landmarks in Yishun - the Sree Maha Mariamman Temple.

According to reports, the origins of the temple date back to the 1930s around 12th milestone, Sembawang, when some Hindus worshipped a timber statue of Sree Maha Mariamman. Later, a shrine was built for the deity in a rubber estate. In the 1940s, the shrine was moved to Sembawang Hills Estate where there was a sizeable Indian population and no Hindu temple nearby.

Later in 1947, it was relocated to Mandai Road, near the former Nee Soon Village and the junction with Upper Thomson Road. By then, it had become a temple which was the focal point for Indians staying around Nee Soon and Sembawang. Religious and cultural activities were organised regularly. In 1965, the temple was officially registered.

As urbanisation took off in northern Singapore, the temple's site at Mandai was acquired to make way for redevelopment. As such, the temple purchased a plot of land along Yishun Avenue 3 in 1993 for its relocation.

On 6 September 1996, Sree Maha Mariamman Temple moved from Mandai Road to its present site. Its move was marked with a procession of a silver chariot in which its deities, including the presiding goddess, Sree Maha Mariamman, were transported. The building, which was predominantly pink in colour, was consecrated in 1997.

In 2010, the pink temple underwent massive refurbishment works in conjunction with a 12-year consecration cycle to transform into the golden temple it is today. The consecration ceremony took place on 18 April 2010.

Today, the temple continues to be a religious and community hub for Hindus staying in the northern part of Singapore. Besides enjoying good ties with other religious organisations in Yishun and Sembawang, it is also active in social welfare and community work and provides help to needy residents through grassroots organisations.



Sree Maha Mariamman Temple along Mandai Road, mid-1900s.
(COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)



Walk along Yishun Avenue 3 to Sembawang Road.

YISHUN JUNIOR COLLEGE
3 Yishun Ring Road

Next to Sri Maha Mariamman Temple, you will see Yishun Junior College. Before the college's buildings were completed, its students had to use facilities in Yishun Secondary School. When the school was finally launched in 1986, it was the first junior college in this northern part of Singapore. It was also the biggest junior college then, comprising six hectares in all.

TEONG SIEW WEI LING DONG SHAN COMBINED TEMPLE
358-360 Yishun Avenue 3

This combined temple consists of three temples: Teong Siew Kuan Temple, Wei Ling Keng and Dong Shan Temple. All three temples originate from different parts of Singapore and moved here in 1990.

When you enter the temple complex, you will see Teong Siew Kuan Temple on your left. This temple was originally located in a village in Jalan Hwi Yoh, present-day Serangoon North, and is estimated to be over a hundred years old. It was established by Chinese migrants of the surname Toh, from Nan An county in China. In the temple, you may still see the statue of the first deity brought over from China. During the sixth and seventh day of the tenth lunar month, the temple will hold a festival to celebrate the birthdays of its patron deities.

Dong Shan Temple started out as a small temple housed in an attap hut in Mandai Tekong around the early 20th century. A bigger and more magnificent temple was constructed in the early 1960s by the villagers.

Wei Ling Keng was founded in 1938. It was originally located at 7th mile Upper Thomson Road, a place known as Ban Kok Sua (Hokkien: Ban Kok Hill, "Ban Kok" being the name of a person).

Traditional Businesses



Along Sembawang Road, you can find some of the oldest businesses in Yishun and Sembawang. Pop by and have a chat with the owners!

GIN THYE CAKE MAKER **423 Sembawang Road**

Before moving here in 1976, Mdm Ang Siew Gek's family used to bake pastries at their kampung house in Bah Soon Pah for sale at the market in Sembawang. Today, this is one of the few local shops which sell handmade Teochew pastries. Look out for the baskets on the top shelf in the shop, which are used to contain traditional sweets such as peanut and sesame candies as wedding gifts.

CHWEE HOON RESTAURANT SEAFOOD SUPPLIER **441 Sembawang Road**

This business began in 1965, when the Loh family started their catering business in Chye Kay Village. In those days, when feasts were held, caterers would be hired to do the cooking while the hosts would provide tables, ingredients and even crockery! The Loh family bought this shop in 1976 when Chye Kay Village was resettled, and named the shop after the founder, Loh Chwee Hoon.

CHONG PANG NASI LEMAK **447 Sembawang Road**

Chong Pang Nasi Lemak was established in the 1960s by a former villager of Sembawang, Mdm Lim Phong. She began by making traditional cakes at home and cycled from village to village to sell them. Later on, she sold Nasi Lemak (Malay: rice cooked with coconut milk and accompanied by side dishes such as fried anchovies, egg omelette, cucumber, etc and chilli) at a place known as 'Pek Suat Teng' (Hokkien: White Snow Pavilion), a row of food stalls along Sembawang Road. Her Nasi Lemak proved to be popular among patrons, and the business grew. Today, this award-winning stall is run by her children.

GURKHA STORE **19 Transit Road**

This tattoo shop has been serving countless foreign military personnel and locals since it opened in 1948. Established by a Nepalese family who migrated from Burma (Myanmar today), the business is now run by the descendants Madan Lal Aitabir and Ram Lal Aitabir. Madan recalled that tattoos used to cost between \$6 to \$15 in the past and that up to the 1970s, most of the clients were military servicemen from Britain, New Zealand, Australia and United States. The nearby barracks also served American soldiers returning from the Vietnam War (1959-1975), and some soldiers would also request tattoos of the names of their fallen comrades.

"When we first moved out of Bah Soon Pah into this shop, across the road, it was all Teochew cemeteries, and some shops housed in zinc roofed huts. Now it is Chong Pang City."

- Mdm Ang Siew Gek (b. 1949),
owner of Gin Thye Cake Maker

Military Bases



One thing you will notice about Yishun and Sembawang is the number of military installations here. When the Singapore Naval Base at Sembawang was established, military installations such as garrison barracks and airbases were set up in northern Singapore to support the Naval Base in land and air defence.

Some of the bases you see here today were built by the British, such as Nee Soon Camp, Sembawang Airbase and Seletar Airbase. Sembawang Airbase, formerly known as the Sembawang Aerodrome, was built in the mid-1930s to serve the Fleet Air Arm of the British Royal Navy and was the fourth aerodrome in Singapore. Seletar Airbase was the first Royal Air Force (RAF) airbase in the Far East when it was completed in 1929. It was also the first international civilian airport in Singapore when it opened to commercial aircraft in 1930.

These bases were handed over to the Singapore Government by the early 1970s when British forces withdrew from Singapore. However, the military bases here continued to serve international forces. For example, ANZUK forces, which comprised troops from Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom, were stationed here till they were disbanded in 1974. Dieppe Barracks served the First Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment till their withdrawal in 1989.

Today, these bases are in use by Singapore Armed Forces as well as international military forces. Seletar Airbase, however, has seen commercial development since it was handed over in 1971. Its facilities were opened to commercial aircraft again and aerospace companies were established at the base. In 2006, the Economic and Development Board announced plans to develop the airbase into a world-class aerospace facility to meet regional aerospace needs, known as the Seletar Aerospace Park.

SUNSET GRILL AND PUB **140B Piccadilly Road**

This quaint eatery located in Seletar Airbase may be a little out of the way. But for those who feel love spicy food, it may be well worth it to hunt down the chilli-coated Buffalo wings here. Run by Mr Jerry Griffis, who used to own an aerospace company, ASTI Inc., in Seletar

Airbase, the eatery offers levels of spiciness ranging from one, the mildest level, to a scorching level 35!

SEMBAWANG RESEARCH STATION **17km Sembawang Road**

Run by the Agri-food & Veterinarian Authority (AVA) today, this research station along Bah Soon Pah Road was built in 1959 by the government to facilitate research in agriculture and animal husbandry. Over the years, the station has conducted extensive research into different aspects of agriculture and primary production, such as improving the yield of crops and cross-breeding of orchids. The findings have helped to transform the agricultural industry in Singapore and bring about the implementation of technology in local farms and nurseries. Today, the station's role also includes services such as animal quarantine and providing technical advice and support on horticulture.

NEE SOON AGROTECHNOLOGY PARK **Bah Soon Pah Road**

Nee Soon Agrotechnology Park, comprising several hi-tech farms and nurseries, is one of the six such parks in Singapore spearheaded by AVA in the mid-1980s. In land-scarce Singapore, the adoption of technology has allowed intensive use of land for agriculture, as can be seen in these farms. Some of the farms here, such as Oh Chin Huat Hydroponic Farms and Goodland Hydroponic Farm use hydroponics, a method which allows plants to be grown in water without using soil, to cultivate vegetables. These farms are also active in promoting agriculture in Singapore. Oh Chin Huat Farms facilitates research on the farm, some of which is published in industry magazines. Green Valley Farms also holds regular talks on topics relating to plants and agriculture. Take a walk down the road to see how farming in Singapore is carried out today!



Cross the road and take bus 980. Alight five stops later at Masjid Ahmad Ibrahim.

109 Sembawang Road
Spiritual Grace Presbyterian Church



SPIRITUAL GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

109 Sembawang Road

Established in 1908 by Chinese missionary Tay Sek Tin, this church, formerly known as Chinese Christian Church, was supported by pioneers such as Teo Eng Hock (1871-1957) and Lim Nee Soon. In 1924, the church moved to its present location to make way for the expansion of Lim Nee Soon's rubber factory. In compensation, Lim Nee Soon donated the land and funds for a new building..

The old chapel you see on the right side actually dates back to 1967. By the 1960s, the original building funded by Lim Nee Soon had deteriorated badly and was demolished. This building, completed in 1967, was put up with donations from Chinese businessman, Ang Oon Hue (1910-1998).

As the congregation grew over the years, more facilities were needed. In 2004, a new building was completed. Today, the church is active in community service.

"We stayed in a small room behind the old chapel. The room had no windows then and whenever it rained, it flooded up to two or three feet high! My mother had to put us, the children, on the table."

Reverend Phua Chee Kwang (b. 1962), who grew up in the church where his father was formerly the pastor.

TAY SEK LIN (1872-1944)

Founder of Spiritual Grace Presbyterian Church and a few other churches in Singapore, Tay Sek Tin came as a missionary to Malaya in 1897 from Hui An County, China. He was also a Chinese revolutionary and was close to Sun Yat-Sen. In 1902, he helped to found the Chinese Reading Room in Tanjong Pagar. The organisation was a key communication and recruitment channel for Chinese revolutionary group Tong Meng Hui. Tay Sek Tin was also known for raising funds to rehabilitate opium addicts and setting-up schools in Singapore. In 1911, he retired from the church due to ill health and joined Lim Nee Soon in the rubber industry. He passed away in 1944.

MASJID AHMAD IBRAHIM AND MADRASAH AT-TAHZIBIAH AL-ISLAMIAH
15 Jalan Ulu Seletar

Along Sembawang Road, you can see this old mosque, which is over 40 years old. Established in 1961, it began as a surau (Malay: small prayer house) in the small Malay kampung which used to exist here.

This mosque is named after Ahmad bin Ibrahim, former trade unionist and Minister for Labour (1961-1962). In 1955, a surau known as Surau Nee Soon Jalan Ulu Seletar was started to serve the Muslims who had settled in this area. Ahmad bin Ibrahim, who was then representing Sembawang in the Legislative Assembly, encouraged the villagers to upgrade the surau to a mosque, and helped to improve the facilities here. When the mosque was completed, it was named after him. The villagers also started a madrasah (Islamic school) in 1958 to provide religious education for their children.

When the mosque was built, the wooden building consisted of only a main prayer hall. Over the years, the mosque was extended. Presently, this mosque has about 2,000 regular worshippers.



Walk down Sembawang Road to the junction of Mandai Road and Sembawang Road.

南興
店 店 店

Former Nee Soon Village



Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew visiting Nee Soon Village in March 1963.
(COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)



Lim Nee Soon's former residence, 1918.
(SOURCE: LIM HSIEN COLLECTION, COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)



Nee Soon Village in the mid-1900s.
(COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)

Formerly located around the junction of Mandai Road and Sembawang Road, Nee Soon Village was where the name for Yishun New Town came from. Between the early 1900s to the 1970s, this village was one of the two main commercial centres in this part of Singapore, the other being Chong Pang Village further up north.

Nee Soon Village was named in 1930 after Lim Nee Soon, who brought about significant development to this area in the early 20th century. Lim Nee Soon owned large tracts of rubber and pineapple plantations here, and his rubber-processing factory, Thong Aik Rubber Factory, was established in the village in 1912. As migrants came to work on the plantations and settled down, a number of villages were formed. Nee Soon Village, with its services and amenities, including a cinema, was the centre for these villages.

Over the years, Nee Soon Village continued developing. Services such as a market, clinics, motor-car workshops and laundry shops were set up. The establishment of the Naval Base in the 1920s also spurred growth as British military personnel and their families patronised businesses here. Nee Soon Village lasted till the early 1980s, when it was cleared to make way for development.

RUBBER AND PINEAPPLE PLANTATIONS

In the late 1800s, there were a number of pineapple plantations established along Seletar River, owned by Chinese businessmen such as Tan Tye (1839-1898) and Tan Kah Kee (1874-1961). Tan Kah Kee also owned a pineapple factory at the foot of Seletar River.

When rubber planting took off in Singapore during the early 20th century, large rubber plantations were established along Seletar River, and extended till Sungei Sembawang. Pineapples were planted alongside rubber trees as the trees took time to mature and pineapples provided cash returns in the meantime. In the 1930s, rubber prices plummeted. The industry declined and rubber planting was steadily phased out.

A LEGACY IN NAMES

These street names are the few links to Nee Soon Village's past today. Thong Bee and Thong Soon Roads were all named after businesses and shops owned by Lim Nee Soon and Chong Kuo Road was named after his eldest son.

(HAKKA) AMPANG YONG TOU FOU 928 Upper Thomson Road

Along Upper Thomson Road, you can find this popular *yong tau hu* (A Chinese dish with various kinds of stuffed beancurd and vegetables) coffee shop. This eatery was started in the 1970s in former Nee Soon by the Pang family who migrated from Ampang, Kuala Lumpur. Run by the descendents of the family today, the *yong tau hu* served up here is still traditionally Hakka though the recipe has been slightly adapted to local taste. What makes the food here unique is that the *yong tau hu* comes with an aromatic sauce instead of the usual clear soup.



Sin Li Chuan Pineapple Factory was opened by Tan Kah Kee at kangkar in 1905. (Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore)

» Did you know?

Before the name 'Nee Soon Village' was coined, the settlement here was known as Chan Chu Kang or *kangkar*. Chan Chu Kang was named after Chan Ah Lak (1813-1873), who founded a settlement here when he bought 44 acres of land here to plant gambier and pepper.

Kang refers to 'waterways' in Teochew and *kar* means 'foot'. This term came to refer to settlements that developed at the foot of rivers. As such, the settlement located at the foot of Seletar River was also called *kangkar*. In Teochew, *chu* means 'house', hence Chan Chu Kang means the house of Chan at the river. In the 1900s, however, Chan Chu Kang's meaning was lost as new settlers arrived. Gradually, it became known as Chia Jui Kang, meaning 'freshwater waterway'.

Upper Seletar Reservoir



By the 20th century, Singapore's population had grown significantly as migrants poured in and settled here. To meet rising water needs, the Water Engineer recommended in 1920 that another reservoir be created by damming Seletar River. This reservoir was thus built in the same year.

ORANG SELETAR

Indigenous nomads known as Orang Seletar used to traverse the waterways in this northern part of Singapore, even up to the 1980s. The Orang Seletar lived on houseboats, where all their belongings and food were stored. Fishing was their main activity, and they used spears rather than nets. They were known for their rich knowledge of the mangroves and the forest flora and fauna, as well as their expertise in gathering products from these sources. In the 1960s, the Orang Seletar began moving out of Singapore. By the late 1980s, most of them had resettled in Johor, Malaysia. The remainder are assimilated with the Malay population today.



An Orang Seletar family along the Johor Straits, 1950.
(SOURCE: IVAN POLUNIN COLLECTION, COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)

A typical bangsal, or hut, where gambier was processed. This also served as the lodgings for workers. (SOURCE: GRETCHEN LIU COLLECTION, COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE)

» Did you know?

Upper Seletar Reservoir Park is a favourite spot for photography and family outings. Up to the 1980s, the viewing tower in the park was a highly popular backdrop for wedding photography too!

GAMBIER AND PEPPER

Before rubber and pineapple planting took over, Seletar River and its surroundings were covered with gambier and pepper plantations. The first known gambier and pepper plantation here was actually discovered by the British in 1847, along a branch of the Seletar River.

Pepper was usually planted with gambier as the refuse from gambier processing could be used to protect the roots of pepper while fertilising them at the same time. Gambier could also be harvested while the planters waited for pepper to mature. By the late 1800s, gambier and pepper planting had dwindled in Singapore as most planters moved to Johor.



You have come to the end of the Yishun & Sembawang Heritage Trail. We hope you have enjoyed the trail and found that the two towns are really much more than what they seem to be. The National Heritage Board has also developed community trails for other parts of Singapore. Get a copy of the trail brochures or check them out online at <http://heritagetrails.sg>!

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