



trailing nostalgia

DESIREE KOH goes on a retrospective ramble – aided by National Heritage Board’s Heritage Trails programme – to discover more of her home city.

Beyond Singapore’s famous city skyline, there exists a myriad of little lanes and streets, each a treasure trove of historical and cultural heirlooms.

They feature in National Heritage Board’s (NHB) Heritage Trails programme, which chronicles the footprints of the country’s pioneers through landmarks, community icons and stories.

Recently, NHB announced the addition of three new trails to its list of 10, starting with Tiong Bahru in April. It follows the sleepy neighbourhood’s recent resurgence into a trendsetting enclave with indie-cool cafes, restaurants and boutiques digging in their bohemian heels. Two other trails, Toa Payoh and Tampines, will be added later in the year.

Each trail is gloriously researched, and crammed with details from the Oral History Centre and civic organisations, while past and current residents regale with delightful anecdotes.

We highlight four self-guided trails here but you can download your desired guide at nhb.gov.sg. Go explore!



TIONG BAHRU / The trail tells of how Tiong Bahru evolved from a nest for mistresses of rich businessmen – check out the area’s distinctive Art Deco flats – to hipster haven with its eclectic boutiques and eateries. A mere five minutes from one another, Ah Chiang’s Porridge (Block 65 Tong Poh Road, #01-38, Tel: 65 6557 0084) boils its famous congee over charcoal, while java joint Forty Hands (40handscoffee.com) pays tribute to the area with its braised pork belly buns. Nearby, quirky independent bookstore Books Actually (booksactually.com; above) carries modern and classic literature, and knick-knacks.



TOA PAYOH / Formerly a big swamp (Toa Payoh was the local slang for big swamp), this estate is now a serene suburb. The trail takes you through typical heartland (local vernacular for colloquial) settings of markets, hawkker centres and temples. See Block 53 in Toa Payoh’s Lorong 5 where Queen Elizabeth II was first hosted in 1972 (above), and again in 2006. Visit the town’s library – its location was once the site of the 1973 Southeast Asian Peninsula Games Village – and the mosaic-based dragon playground (top) at Block 28 Toa Payoh Lorong 6. These old playgrounds are being replaced by newer ones made of plastic and foam.

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BUKIT TIMAH / Escape the city and delve into one of Singapore’s most lush and verdant communities, home to pricey real estate, behemoth bungalows, undulating nature reserves and great eats. Check out Old Ford Factory (mofnas.sg; above), the first motor car assembly plant in South-east Asia; Singapore’s highest point, Bukit Timah Hill; and Adam Road Food Centre which boasts one of Singapore’s best nasi lemak, a coconut-infused rice dish. For a relaxing breather, go for a stroll in the Singapore Botanic Gardens (www.sbg.org.sg), which also showcases the world’s largest collection of tropical orchids, including Vanda Miss Joaquim, the national flower.



JALAN BESAR / On this trail, start at Syed Alwi Road, where colonial-era shophouses showcase intricate Malay-inspired carvings. Once upon a time, you would have been standing knee-deep in the Kallang River’s tidal flats, trapped within clumps of mangrove trees. Now, the area is an emerging boho-chic district with boutique inns such as the refurbished 86-year-old Kam Leng Hotel (kamling.com). Sporty visitors should catch a match at Jalan Besar Stadium (above). Built in 1932, it is considered the birthplace of Singapore football. After the final whistle, head to 24-hour dim sum stalwart Sweet Choon (sweetchoon.com) for a celebratory supper.