

乌敏岛佛山亭大伯公庙

Pulau Ubin Fo Shan Ting

Da Bo Gong Temple

A Brief Guide for the 2017 Tua Pek Kong Festival

Ubin's Fo Shan Ting Da Bo Gong Temple is the temple of the island's main village. It has been and continues to be the centre of community life since at least the mid-1800s.

However, visitors are likely to miss the main temple for it sits atop 佛山 (Buddha Hill), and instead view the village temple, which draws attention largely on account of its wayang stage.



The Hilltop Temple, photograph by Timothy Pwee, 2016



The Village Temple, photograph by Timothy Pwee, 2016

families which reflects the living nature of the temple as a place of worship.

With the clearance of homes, many villagers have moved to the mainland. But former villagers and their children now living on the main-land still come back annually to Ubin for the Tua Pek Kong festival. In 2008, the Temple Committee made an effort to recruit new members from de-votees who are not former Ubin residents. A third of the Committee now do not originate from Ubin

The Fo Shan Ting Da Bo Gong Temple is currently calling for donations to fund restoration works for the temple, please get in touch with the Temple Committee directly if you wish to contribute to the effort.

An inscription in the Fo Shan Ting Da Bo Gong Temple dates to 1869. This is some years after John Turnbull Thomson used Ubin granite to build Horsburgh Lighthouse in 1850. Thomson even made sketches of his Chinese stonecutters dressing the stone. In fact, granite quarrying only ended in 1999, 150 years after Horsburgh Lighthouse was built. Owing to termite infestations, the 148-year old temple has begun restoration work on its property, where its groundbreaking ceremony occurred in April 2017. The temple bears architectural traditions from both southern China and of the diasporic Chinese in South East Asia. As a result, while the façade is reminiscent of temples in southern China, the interior furnishings of the temple are designed to accommodate the tropical climate.

The Wayang Stage

It is typical of Southern Chinese temples to have a wayang (performance) stage facing the temple altar across an open space. The platform is meant for staging performances during festivals to entertain the gods. However, development has reduced the space available to most Singapore temples and only a three are known to retain their open plaza space and wayang stage. Besides Ubin, Rochore Tua Pek Kong Temple on Balestier Road is another well-known one. Most temple wayangs are now performed on temporary canvas and plank stages in any available open space such as a field or an HDB carpark. The Ubin Da Bo Gong temple is the only temple in Singapore that holds performances on its permanent stage. The temple plaza and stage layout is still common among Malaysian and Indonesian Chinese temples.



The Wayang Stage, photograph by Timothy Pwee, 2011



Loyang Tua Pek Kong, photograph by Timothy Pwee, 2016

大伯公 [Da Bo Gong in Mandarin] Tua Pek Kong

Tua Pek Kong is the informal name for 福德正神 (Fu De Zheng Shen), the local deity in charge of prosperity. There is a Tua Pek Kong for each location. For instance, the Ubin Tua Pek Kong would be in charge of Ubin while the Loyang Tua Pek Kong, another famous Tua Pek Kong, is responsible for Loyang.

The Tua Pek Kong 千秋 (birthday) is generally celebrated on second day of second lunar month, but Ubin Tua Pek Kong communicated his wish to have it on Vesak Day instead.



Jade Emperor Tablet & Urn photograph by Timothy Pwee, 2011

玉皇上帝 [Yu Huang Shang Di in Mandarin] The Heavenly Emperor

The ruler of the popular pantheon of Chinese gods is the Heavenly Emperor. It is to His court that the deities report. All temples would have an urn at their entrance which always faces south. All pay their respects with incense to the Heavenly Emperor, putting their joss sticks in the urn. Respects are paid to him daily and also at the beginning of every ceremonial occasion. That is why ceremonies to Him open and close festivals.

The Heavenly Emperor is more popularly called 天公 (ti kong) by the Hokkiens and often worshipped daily in people's homes. The Ti Kong joss stick urn will be hung above the main entrance or main window of their homes. For shophouses, the urn is often high on the wall or pillar by the entrance. As the Heavenly Emperor cannot spend the night in the human realm, he can only be invited to the temple at 11 pm (子时), which must represent the beginning of the new day.



Tiger Deity, photograph by Timothy Pwee, 2016

虎爷 [Hu Ye in Mandarin]
Tiger Deity

The Hor Yeh or Tiger Deity is commonly associated with Tua Pek Kong and is a protector against evil influences and dark magic. At Ubin, he has his own cave beside the hilltop temple. There, worshippers often bring him offerings of pork, eggs, dried bean curd and noodles.



Earth God, photograph by Timothy Pwee, 2016

土地公 [Tu Di Gong in Mandarin]
Earth God

Much like the Tua Pek Kong, the Earth God or Earth Deity is in charge of a local area but has a specific focus on agricultural fertility. He is common in agricultural villages across China.

There is also the Datuk Kong whose shrine is by the village temple. Like his colleagues, the Earth God and Tua Pek Kong, the Datuk Kong is a locality deity.

大伯公千秋

Tua Pek Kong Festival Events

Invitation to the Festival

(Tue 9 May 2017, 10am)

The opening ritual of the Ubin Tua Pek Kong birthday on Vesak Day begins by inviting Him to attend the festival. The golden body of Tua Pek Kong from the main altar will be set upon the seat of a sedan chair and worshippers carry this palanquin on their shoulders down to the lower temple. Others will carry the golden bodies of the Tiger Deity and the Earth God in their hands and follow in entourage. The trio will be installed in the village temple and offered meats, fish, fruit, sweets and incense.



Tua Pek Kong on Sedan Chair, photograph by Vivienne Wee, 2015

Distribution of Offerings

(Wed 10 May 2017, 2.30pm)

An important custom is the making of offerings to the temple for the festival by devotees, often as an expression of thanks to Tua Pek Kong for a good year. Tables heavily laden with foods from meats to rice will be consecrated during the opening ceremonies. After the Heavenly Emperor is sent off, these offerings will be distributed among the worshippers.

Visit by 韦陀法宫 大二爷伯

(Wei Tua Temple Tua Ji Ya Pek Visit)

(Wed 10 May 2017, 8pm)

The other temple on Ubin is 韦陀法宫 (Wei Tuo Temple). Among the residents at that temple are Tua Ji Ya Pek, a pair of bailiffs from the Underworld who will arrive to celebrate the birthday of the Tua Pek Gong. Their 童乩 (tangkis or spirit mediums) will also make a trip to pay their respects to Tua Pek Kong during the festival.



Tua Ya Pek, photograph by Vivienne Wee, 2015



Wayang Performer, photograph by Vivienne Wee, 2015

Wayang

(Nightly Tue 9 to Sat 13 May 2017)

The traditional entertainment during temple festivals is the wayang (Chinese opera). The Pulau Ubin Tua Pek Kong Temple traditionally engages a Teochew troupe. 新新榮和 (Sin Sin Yong Hwa) will be performing this year. The performances are from various operas and vary from year to year but the final night (will be Sun 14 May this year) is always 葫芦收妖 (Gourd Captures the Evil Spirits).

During the performances, watch for 太子 (Tai Zi), the child god of theatre. Before the start of each performance, an actor and actress in full costumes and make-up will descend from the wayang stage with Hai Ji. They will pay their respects to Tua Pek Kong and install Hai Ji at the temple's altar table facing the wayang stage to watch.

Near the end of the performance, the temple keeper will carry Tai Zi back to the stage on a tray where a costumed and made-up actress will receive the statue. Between performances, Tai Zi's statue resides on the wayang stage altar at the platform's rear.

歌台 (Getai)

(Sun 14 May 2017, 6.45pm)

In this modern world, tastes have moved from traditional opera to the popular variety show featuring pop music and dancing. Changing tastes in entertainment has meant that the getai (literally meaning 'song stage') has become as popular as the wayang, if not more. Getais are rousing performances by popular singers in glitzy costumes

interspersed with comic relief by comperes. Gaining in popularity as Seventh Month entertainment since the 1970s, they are increasingly staged during temple festivals too, and the last night of the Ubin Tua Pek Kong Festival is now a getai night.



Getai, photograph by Vivienne Wee, 2015

Closing the Festival

(Wed14 May 2017, 10.30pm)

At the end of the Festival, Tua Pek Kong will be returned to his hilltop temple.



**Sending off the Loyang Tua Pek Kong,
photograph by Vivienne Wee, 2015**

Free Evening Bumboat Ferry

Free two-way ferry services between Ubin and Changi during the evening will be sponsored throughout the celebration.

Programme for 2017 Tua Pek Gong Festival 庆祝大伯公千秋

Tue 9 May 2017 四月十四日 (4M14)	10am Invite Tua Pek Kong 1pm Rituals Begin 3.30pm Rite 1 7pm Rite 2 7pm Teochew Opera 10pm Inviting the Heavenly Emperor
Wed 10 May 2017 四月十五日 (4M15) Vesak Day	10am Rituals Begin 1pm Lion & Dragon Dance 2.30pm Distribution of Offerings 3.30pm Sending off the Heavenly Emperor 7pm Teochew Opera 7.30pm Crossing the Peace Bridge 8pm Visit of Wei Tuo Temple Tua Ji Ya Pek
Thu 11 – Fri 12 May 2017 四月十六至十七日 (4M16-4M17)	7pm Teochew Opera
Sat 13 May 2017 四月十八日 (4M19)	7pm Teochew Opera 7.30pm Visit of Tai Zi Gong Wu Dian Er Ye Bo
Sun 14 May 2017 四月十九日 (4M19)	10am Teochew Opera (singing only) 6.45pm Getai 10.30pm Sending Tua Pek Kong back

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