

Jalan Jalan di Ubin

[Tour itinerary] 16th July 2017

<i>Time</i>	<i>Description</i>
12.30 pm	Set off from meeting point – SHS booth
12.40 pm	Stop 1: Malay village Narration by Mr Choo, Ahmad and Vivienne
1.00 pm	Leave Ahmad's house
1.05 pm	Stop 2: Chinese cemetery Narration by Mr Choo and Vivienne
1.25 pm	Leave the cemetery
1.30 pm	Stop 3: Weituo Fagong Temple Narration by Vivienne and Madam Ong
1.50 pm	Leave the temple
1.55 pm	Stop 4: Living Fisher Village , otherwise known as A Kok's house Narration by Philip Lim
2.15 pm	Leave A Kok's house
2.20 pm	Stop 5: On the shore of the German Girl Shrine , followed by a mangrove walk Narration by Quek Kim Kiang
2.40 pm	Leave the area
2.45 pm	Arrive at the Main Village and convene at the Tua Pek Kong Temple to talk about how we can protect our last island kampung.





Tua Pek Kong Temple

(Photographs from 1980s - 1990s, Source: NAS, Photographer: Jackie Sam)

The *Fo Shan Ting Da Bo Gong* Temple is the temple of Pulau Ubin's main village. Since the 1880s, the temple has been and continues to serve as the center of community life on the island. While the main temple sits atop *Foshan* 佛山 (Buddha Hill), and is thus hidden from sight, the village temple is situated along the thoroughfare of the main village, opposite its wayang stage. Dating back to 1869, the temple bears architectural traditions from both southern China and of the diasporic Chinese in Southeast Asia. While the façade is reminiscent of temples in southern China, the interior furnishings of the temple are designed to accommodate the tropical climate.

Although most villagers have moved to the mainland due to the clearance of homes, many of them and their children still return to Ubin for the annual Tua

Pek Kong festival. In 2008, the Temple Committee made an effort to recruit new members from devotees who are not former Ubin residents. A third of the Committee now do not originate from Ubin families, reflecting the living nature of the temple as a place of worship.

Kampung Houses

(1970s, Source: NAS, Photographer: Jackie Sam)

The first settlers on Ubin were the Malays. Under the permission of the then-Sultan (who resided at Kampung Glam Palace), Encik Endut Senin founded Kampung Surau in the 1880s. 50-odd Malay families later migrated to Ubin, expanding the community into 3 kampungs: Kampung Melayu, Kampung Sungei Durian and Kampung Surau. Due to the abundance of fishing and farming opportunities, the Chinese later arrived and settled at Ubin Town and Kampung Jelutong. In the years that followed, the industry of granite quarrying then took off.

Pulau Ubin features an eclectic mix of traditional shophouses and kampung houses. The kampungs are usually self-sufficient, possessing their own water supply, shops, places of worship and a cemetery. The early rural Singapore kampung featured two predominant styles: Malay and Chinese.



Malay Kampung Houses

Drawing from the architectural cultures across the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, the Malay kampung house typically possesses these features: (1) A steep roof, usually made of attap thatch, which insulates heat and deters the rain effectively; (2) A verandah at the front that provides ample ventilation; (3) A kitchen, usually located at the rear; (4) A raised floor made possible by stilts, which facilitates ventilation, deters wandering animals, and protects the house from potential floods; (5) Timber as its main structural material.

Chinese Kampung Houses

In contrast, Chinese houses are typically not raised above the ground. The upper timber walls rest on a low foundation wall, while the floors tend to be made of bare compacted earth. The main door is usually flanked by solid plank windows on either side. Chinese kampung houses also do not possess a verandah, but rather, attain ventilation a gap of 2 to 3 feet between the top of the wall and the underside of the roof. The house is usually rectangular in plan, with a central living room area flanked by bedrooms on either side of the hall. Similar to the Malay house, the placement of the kitchen is at the rear.

Wei Tuo Temple

The Wei Tuo Temple had its humble beginnings in the 1950s. As a private residence to the Ong family, it served as a hostel for quarry workers. Like other Ubinites, the Ong family had an altar at home to various gods; the quarry workers who lodged at their home subsequently begun praying to the gods. At that time, the family was making offerings to a big

rock they regarded as an embodiment of a *Datuk Gong* 拿督公 – a native local spirit up the hill – located where their fruit orchard was and where there are still fruit trees.

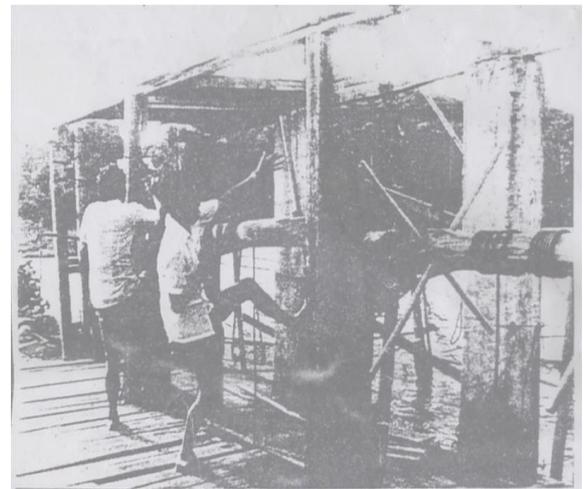


In the 1950s, an explosion in the nearby quarry caused a large rock to fly and smash into the house. Although the physical building was destroyed, fortunately, there were no casualties. Owing to this fortunate incident, the quarry workers then began to revere the stone as *Shi Tou Gong* 石头公 (Stone God). The rock was painted golden in colour and then set up at its present site. The workers subsequently founded a temple for the Stone God, and which we now know as the Wei Tuo Temple. As the years passed, the functions of the Wei Tuo Temple evolved with time. It now serves a temple for refugee gods, some of whom had lost their temples on the mainland to urbanisation.



residents began to dub her the “Nadu Guniang”, a Malay-Chinese appropriation of “Datuk” and “girl”. The shrine is situated next to an Assam tree, and nestled amongst lallang and grass. As the reported sightings of her ghost increased, her remains were moved to a nearby Chinese shrine and kept in an urn. While her remains have long been looted, the urn remains.

Prawn Farms



Prawn farms were introduced to Pulau Ubin from the late 1950s and sluice gates were built to regulate the water levels of the prawn ponds. As a result, most of the mangrove swamps on the island were drained over the years, linking up different parts of Ubin and making most of the island accessible by foot. However, long-term prawn farming on Ubin has caused severe salination and chemical pollution of its ecological environment. The ponds where prawn farms used to be are not only no longer in use today, but cannot sustain new life.

Following the closure of the quarries, the *Datuk Gong* worshipped at the different sites was gathered at Madam Ong’s place. As the *Datuk Gong* are non-Chinese gods, other non-Chinese gods also came to be worshipped in this part of the temple, such as Hindu gods, Burmese *nat* (spirits) and Thai gods. On the advice of a Taoist master, the Ong family invited the god *Wei Tuo* 韋陀, a Chinese general who was a protector of Buddhism, to be the main god of the temple. The Chinese part of the temple became the dominant part, eventually with the whole temple complex becoming Wei Tuo Temple. (Mdm Ong Siew Fong is our narrator for *Jalan Jalan di Ubin* 2017.)

The lake in front of the temple used to be a prawn pond. While it did not originally bear religious significance, a pagoda with sea dragons was built into it in the 1980s, while tortoises begun to be reared in its waters. In the 1990s, several Tibetan buddhists arrived on Ubin and made the area across the lake a place of worship. The Tibetan temple features an extensive collection of Sanskrit tablets brought in from Nepal.

Nadu Guniang

The German Girl Shrine contains the remains of a German girl who perished in 1914 after falling off a steep cliff whilst fleeing from the British who had come to capture her family. Her body was discovered in a quarry the next day and she was subsequently buried nearby. Following this, Ubin



Kampung Sungei Tiga Cemetery

There are two Chinese cemeteries on the island of Ubin. The one we are visiting is the main one. This is one of the oldest cemeteries in Singapore, where old burial practices can be seen. There are at least two distinctive features that visitors can notice. One is that there are deceased persons from different Chinese dialect groups. This is distinctive because on the mainland, cemeteries tend to be grouped accordingly to dialect group. The reason for the diversity of dialect groups is because the quarries that had existed on Ubin attracted many different workers. So this was also a feature of the Ubin Kampung – it was diverse with people speaking many different dialects. The second distinctive feature of the Ubin cemetery is that most of the gravestones indicate that couples were buried together. The gravestone was carved when the first spouse died, with space left for the second surviving spouse, usually coloured red or green to signify that the person is still living. Mr Chu Yok Choon, our

narrative, said that when the second spouse died, the coffin would be slipped in from the side of the grave to repose next to the first spouse. We will hear more about this from him. For some decades already, the government has not allowed further burials to be done on Ubin.

The Jetty



School children welcoming Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on his arrival at Pulau Ubin Jetty, taken on 15/11/1964

(Source: Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA), NAS)

Ubin’s main jetty was built in 1978, in order to cater to the number of visitors arriving on the island due to granite quarrying operations. The main jetty was subsequently upgraded in 1994 to feature a sheltered walkway and seating area for the comfort of visitors. During the Japanese Occupation, the island was first served by a jetty built by Japanese troops, located a short walk away from the main jetty that we see today. Boats carrying passengers had to beach on mud plains to let their passengers alight. The passengers then made their way on foot across the mud plains to eventually reach the island. Some Ubin residents own their own “private” jetties, at which they park their smaller boats.

This brochure is jointly brought to you by the Singapore Heritage Society, Dr Vivienne Wee, Miss Clarice Lee, and the residents of Pulau Ubin.



If you are interested in giving a future to our past, do visit us at our website at www.singaporeheritage.org. You can also like our Facebook and Instagram pages at Singapore Heritage Society to keep updated on our latest events.