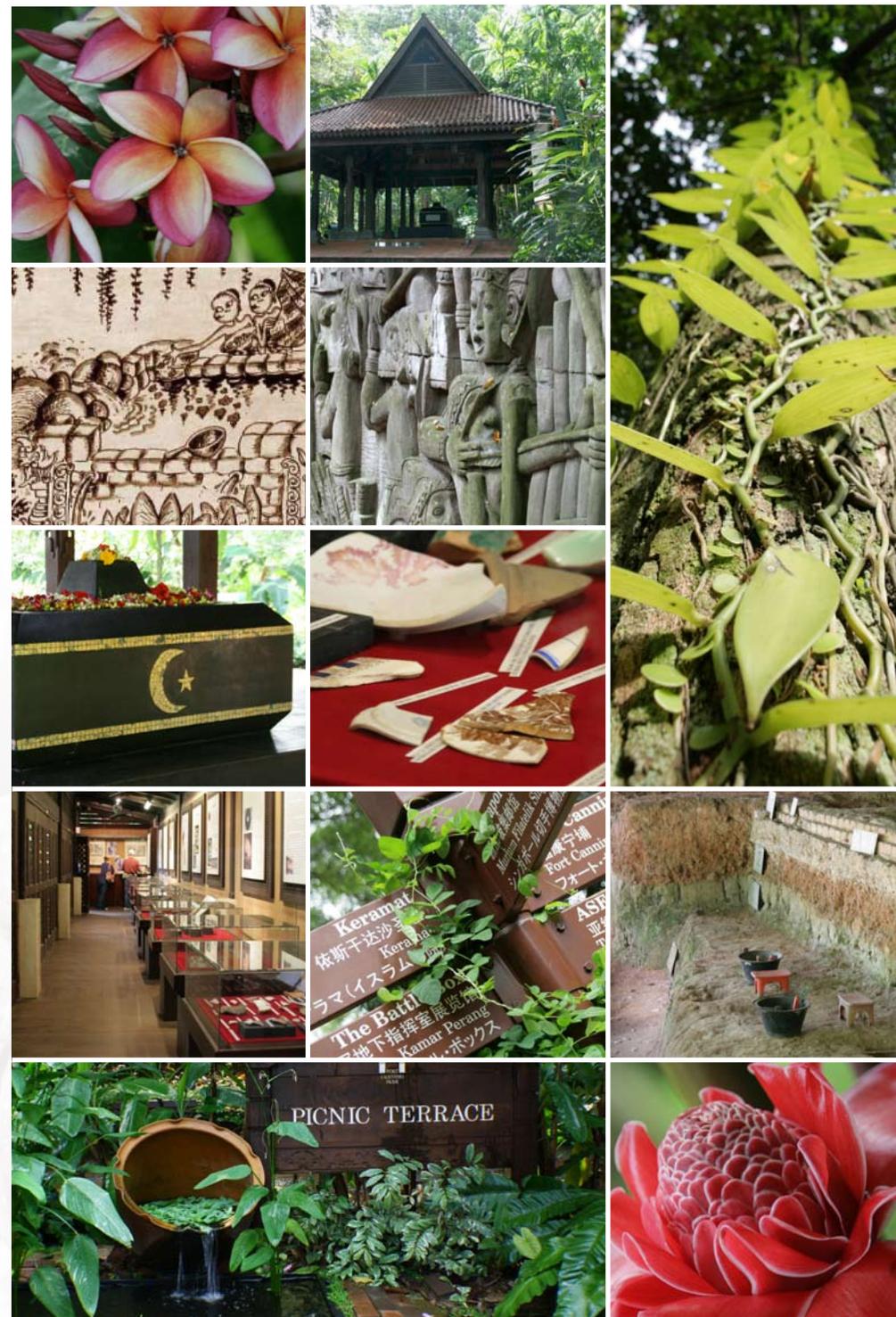


# A Guide to Singapore's Ancient History Walking Trail at Fort Canning Park

Fort Canning Park is steeped in Singapore's history. Artefacts uncovered during the construction of the reservoir in 1926 and recent archaeological digs show that Fort Canning Hill housed a kingdom in the 14th century. Extensive Malay and Chinese historical records support the evidence that the royal palace of ancient Malay rulers stood on the summit of this once "Forbidden Hill".

As you embark on this trail, stroll back in time to the era of the five kings and the golden age of 14th century Singapore. Visit the keramat that shelters an ancient tomb. This tomb purportedly contains the remains of the last ruler of pre-colonial Singapore. Explore the archaeological dig, where several 14th century artefacts on display reveal evidence of trading with Chinese merchants during that era. Stop at the interpretative signboards that point out historic locations and intriguing information on ancient Singapore.



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## Highlights

- Spice garden
- Heritage trees
- Keramat (shrine) housing an ancient tomb of the last ruler of pre-colonial Singapore
- Archaeological dig and exhibition area
- Interpretative signboards pointing out historic locations and interesting information on ancient Singapore
- Mural Wall

## Legend

- |  |  |                 |
|--|--|-----------------|
|  |  | Toilet          |
|  |  | Restaurant      |
|  |  | Vending Machine |
|  |  | UnderPass       |
|  |  | Shelter         |
|  |  | MRT Station     |
|  |  | Bus Stop        |
|  |  | Heritage Tree   |
|  |  | Telephone       |



# A Guide to Singapore's Ancient History Walking Trail at Fort Canning Park



## → 1

### Heritage Tree – Rain Tree (*Samanea saman*)

This heritage rain tree marks the start of the trail.

The rain tree, a native of Central America, is planted in Singapore for its large, shady, umbrella-shaped crown. Its trunk and branches host beautiful ferns and orchids, and its leaves often fold up at dusk or before an impending rain.

Scattered throughout the park are mature trees like this rain tree. These trees have been given the Heritage Tree status under the Singapore's Heritage Tree Scheme, as part of efforts to promote the conservation of mature trees in Singapore.

## → 2

### Petai Tree (*Parkia speciosa*)

The Petai (*Parkia speciosa*) is a beautiful tree you can find on this walking trail.

This umbrella-shaped tree can grow up to 14m high. Its flowers are long, creamy-white and emit a milky smell.

The seeds of the Petai are commonly eaten, as they are believed to have cleansing properties for the kidneys.

## → 3

### Fort Canning Pre-colonial History and the 5 Kings

Stop here to get a quick overview of Fort Canning's place in Singapore's history from the storyboards. Also, read more about Singapore's five kings in the 14th century. This kingdom ended when the last king, Sri Sultan Iskandar Syah, was driven out of Singapore by attackers. He eventually founded a new capital at Malacca.

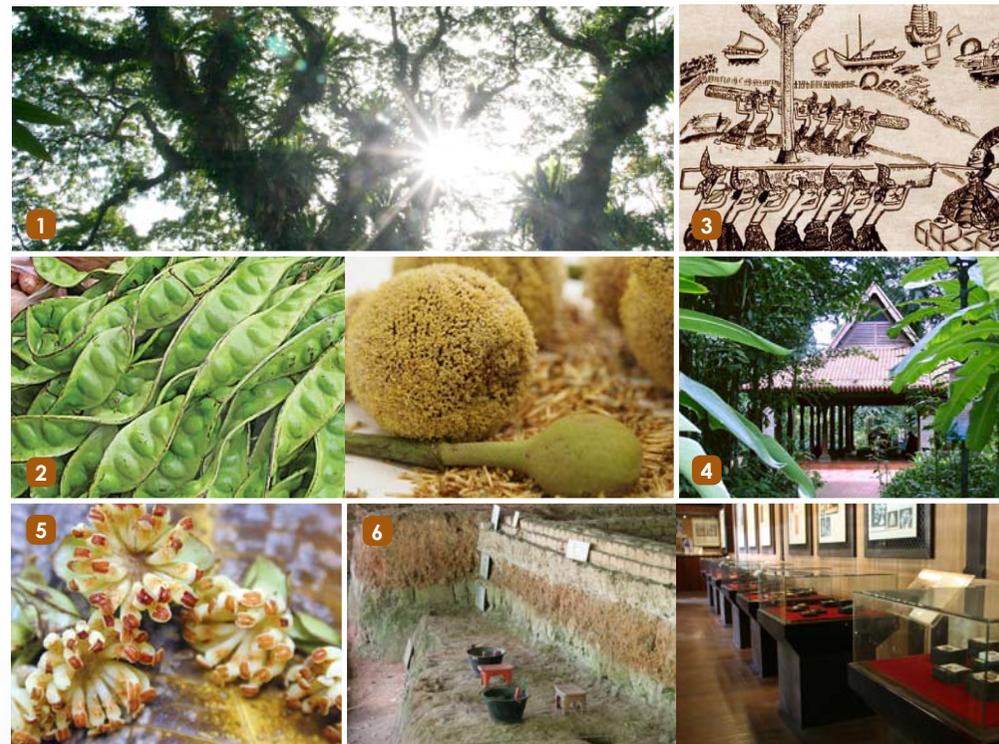
## → 4

### Keramat

At this terrace, view the keramat or shrine, an old tomb that purportedly contains the remains of Sri Sultan Iskandar Shah, the fifth and last ruler of pre-colonial Singapore.

This terrace has been popularly regarded as an auspicious place; some people believe they can ask for specific favours here.

Look carefully at the architecture of the keramat with a 14th Century-styled Malay roof called a pendopo. The twenty wooden pillars holding up the roof are carved in a fighting cock motif of Javanese origin.



## → 5

### Spice Garden

You are now walking down the steps that pave the way through the spice garden. This Spice Garden is a small replica of the original garden Sir Stamford Raffles established in 1822 as the first experimental and botanical garden in Singapore.

At that time, spices were as valuable as gold among the English, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese. There was a fight for control over the sources and routes to the Spice Islands of Southeast Asia and India. In response to this fervor, the garden at Fort Canning was planted mainly with nutmeg, clove and other economic plants.

This pandan-scented garden is now a showcase of local herbs and spices. The butterfly pea, tamarind, ginger and lemongrass are some of the plants you can see, touch and smell at the Spice Garden.

More importantly, this garden, as with the rest of the lush greenery at Fort Canning, is a main source

of food for local fauna. Squirrels, butterflies, birds and dragonflies are part of the large living habitat thriving on this hill.

## → 6

### Archaeological dig and exhibition area

Go round the bend and follow the path that leads you to the archaeological dig and exhibition area, one of the biggest attractions on this trail.

On display are several 14th century artefacts uncovered by researchers at the site. These artefacts provide evidence that way before the arrival of the British in 1819, Chinese merchants were already travelling to this part of the world to engage in trade.

The artefacts also suggest that the site was used by palace craftsmen who manufactured glass and gold items.



# A Guide to Singapore's Ancient History Walking Trail at Fort Canning Park



## → 7 14<sup>th</sup> Century Gold Ornaments

From this spot, you can obtain a glimpse of the reservoir at the summit of the hill.

During the construction of this reservoir in 1926, 14th century-style Hindu Javanese gold ornaments were found 3 meters below the surface of the ground. The most beautiful find was an armet decorated with the head of kala, a demonic beast and son of the Hindu goddess Durga. This motif was often showcased in the artwork of ancient Sumatra and Java.

You can view the uncovered gold ornaments in the National Museum of Singapore.

## → 8 Ancient Garden

As you continue on your walk, imagine yourself in the midst of an ancient garden filled with fruit trees like the durian, rambutan, starfruit and duku (some of which can now be found in the spice garden).

Gardens with fruit trees were a prominent feature in early Southeast Asian palaces. One such ancient garden was likely to have existed in the area you are walking in now.

## → 9 Possible site of Royal Palace

You are now at the Picnic Terrace, an event space suitable for garden parties and small functions at Fort Canning. This is a possible site of part of the Malay ruler's palace grounds in the 14th century.

Like other ancient Southeast Asian palaces, the palace here would have comprised large wooden buildings on stilts (elaborately decorated with carvings), a royal bathing place near the spring, a garden, religious shrines and workshops for craftsmen.

Royalty, servants, guards and artists were most probably the people living within the palace compounds.

Stop at the far corner of the Picnic Terrace for a tongue-in-cheek cartoon depiction of the 5 kings of Singapore and summary of Singapore in the 14th century.

## → 10 The Parit Singapore

You are now standing on a tiny bridge that most probably used to overlook a small fresh water stream. This stream has now completely disappeared.



According to ancient Malay and Chinese sources, Singapore had a moat and a wall. It ran along this stream that was most probably the Parit Singapura (Moat of Singapore). This wall was still standing when the British first arrived on the island.

## → 11 Mural Wall

This interesting mural wall, carved out by Balinese artisans, gives an artistic depiction of 14th century events and information pertaining to Singapore's history.

To follow the sequence of events unravelled on the wall, look at the signboard opposite the mural wall. Read interesting nuggets of information on pre-historic Fort Canning, a Siamese attack on Singapore and Singapore from the 16th to 18th century.

## → 12 Settlements in 14<sup>th</sup> Century Singapore – Singapore's Golden Age

As you continue on your walk here, imagine yourself going back in time to the 14th century. Visualize yourself standing right here in the midst of a thriving settlement extending from this hill to the flat ground of Padang and towards the north bank of the Singapore River.

Wang Dayuan, a Chinese trader who visited Singapore in 1330, described this settlement as "the hill back of Dragon's Tooth Strait... it rises to a hollow-topped summit enclosed in a series of slopes; the people live all around it".

"Dragon's Tooth Strait", a pirate lair known as Longyamen, was the other settlement found in 14th century Singapore.

Malay records and archaeological finds indicate that Singapore was a prosperous port between 1300 and 1400. Malay and Chinese merchants and probably Indian traders met here for barter trade.

# A Guide to Singapore's Ancient History Walking Trail at Fort Canning Park



## → 13

### The Singapore Stone and the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Strongman

From this spot, you can see the Singapore River in the far distance ahead. A large boulder, known as the Singapore Stone, once stood at the mouth of this river, near to where the Merlion stands today. It was engraved with a long inscription written during the 14th century or earlier.

In 1843, the boulder was blown up by British Army engineers preparing ground for Fort Fullerton, and only a few fragments were saved. The remaining pieces of the stone are now preserved in the Calcutta and Singapore museums.

The Singapore Stone is linked to the story of the legendary 14th century Strongman called Badang. According to Malay historical records, Badang performed an amazing feat; he threw a stone from Fort Canning Hill to the mouth of the Singapore River (this was about 500 metres!).

## → 14

### The Forbidden Spring

You are now on the west side of Fort Canning Hill, along which once flowed a spring known as the "Forbidden Spring". Only the wife and consorts of the king had access to this spring for bathing.

This spring provided enough pure drinking water to supply all ships visiting Singapore until 1830.

## → 15

### Singapore from 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Century

As you journey on the last segment of this walking trail, read more about the turning of the tides in Singapore's position as an important trading port when it became overshadowed by Malacca in the 15th century.

The following period for Singapore was an eventful one. The Portuguese gained control over Malacca in the 16th century and launched several attacks on Singapore in the 17th century.

## → 16

### Heritage Tree - Terap

Here you can see another heritage tree, the Terap. (*Artocarpus elasticus*).

This tall forest tree can be found throughout the Malay Peninsula. The young leaves have prominent, pointed lobes while the larger leaves of the mature trees are leathery and oval-shaped.

Its Latin name is a reference to the elastic latex produced by this tree. The tough and fibrous inner bark can be used for lining baskets or can be woven into ropes. The uniquely sweet-tasting fruit is slimy, much like the chempedak, but with smaller seeds.



## → 17

### Ruins of Ancient Singapore

You are now standing near the former summit of Fort Canning Hill, which was levelled to provide space for a fort in 1860. This location marks the end of the walking trail.

We hope you have enjoyed your walk on this trail. For another slice of Singapore's history, embark on the Singapore's Colonial History Walking Trail at Fort Canning.

