



CHINATOWN

A Walking Guide

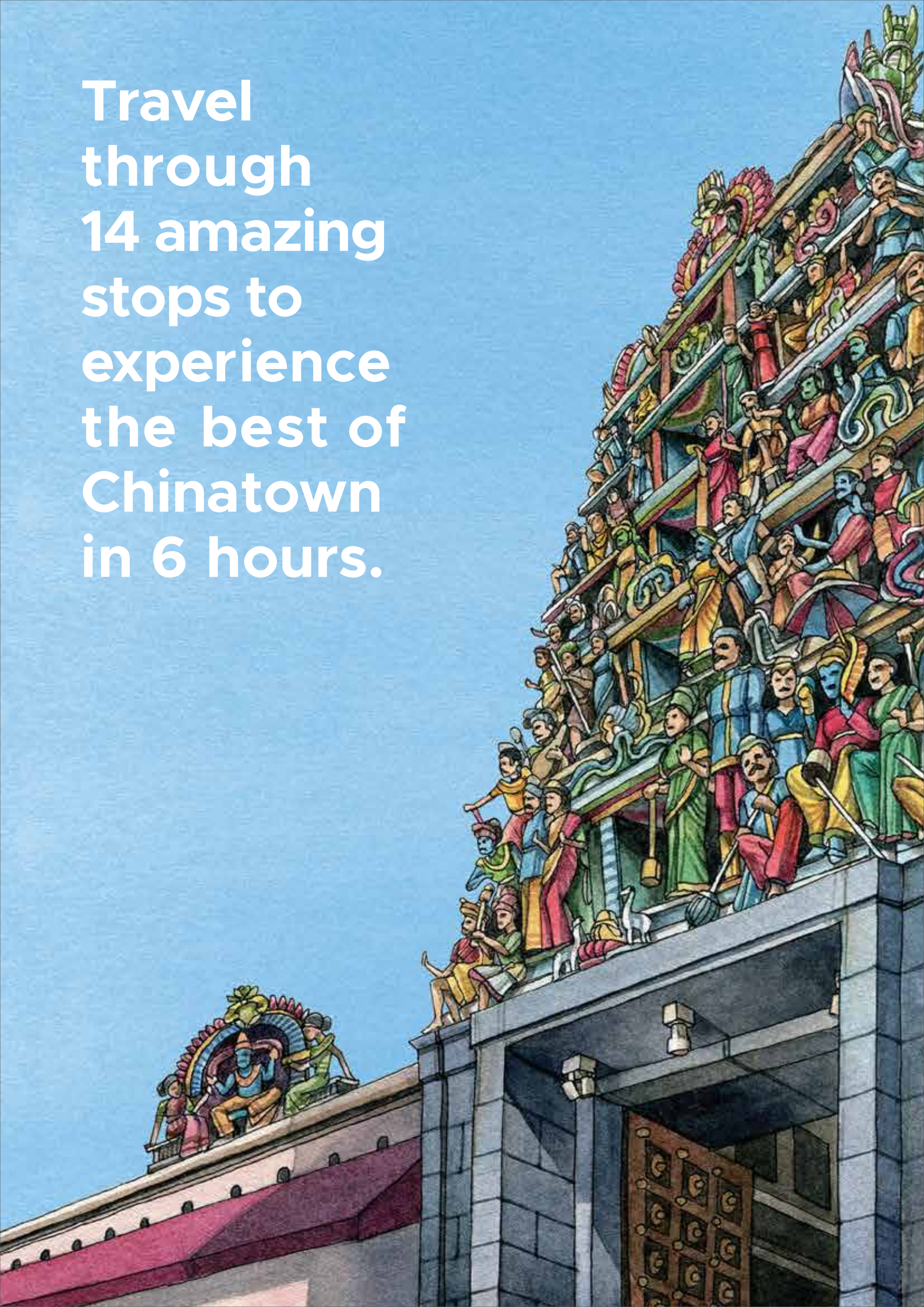


Kreta Ayer

Telok Ayer

Bukit Pasoh

Travel
through
14 amazing
stops to
experience
the best of
Chinatown
in 6 hours.



A quick introduction to the neighbourhoods

Kreta Ayer

Kreta Ayer means “water cart” in Malay. It refers to ox-drawn carts that brought water to the district in the 19th and 20th centuries. The water was drawn from wells at Ann Siang Hill.

Back in those days, this area was known for its clusters of teahouses and opera theatres, and the infamous brothels, gambling houses and opium dens that lined the streets. Much of its sordid history has been cleaned up. However, remnants of its vibrant past are still present – especially during festive periods like the Lunar New Year and the Mid-Autumn celebrations.

Telok Ayer

Meaning “bay water” in Malay, **Telok Ayer** was at the shoreline where early immigrants disembarked from their long voyages. Designated a Chinese district by Stamford Raffles in 1822, this is the oldest neighbourhood in Chinatown.

Covering Ann Siang and Club Street, this richly diverse area is packed with trendy bars and hipster cafés housed in beautifully conserved shophouses.

Bukit Pasoh

Located on a hill, **Bukit Pasoh** is lined with award-winning restaurants, boutique hotels, and conserved art deco shophouses. Once upon a time, earthen pots were produced here. Hence, its name – *pasoh*, which means pot in Malay. The most vibrant street in this area is Keong Saik Road – a former red-light district where gangs and vice once thrived. Today, it’s a hip enclave for stylish hotels, cool bars and great food.

Bukit Pasoh

Kreta Ayer Stop 1 - 12



- Souvenir/Shopping
- 8A: Kele Pineapple Tarts
- 8B: Tai Chong Kok Pastries
- 8C: Nanyang Old Coffee
- 8D: Pek Sin Choon
- 8E: On Cheong Jewellery
- 8F: Poh Heng Jewellery
- 8G: Yue Hwa
- 8H: Thye Shan
- 8J: Eu Yan Sang
- 8K: Lim Chee Guan
- 8L: Kim Joo Guan
- 8M: Bee Cheng Hiang
- Recommended spots for food and drinks
- Extra stops
- Michelin-starred restaurants

Telok Ayer Stop 13 - 14

A CHINATOWN LIKE NO OTHER

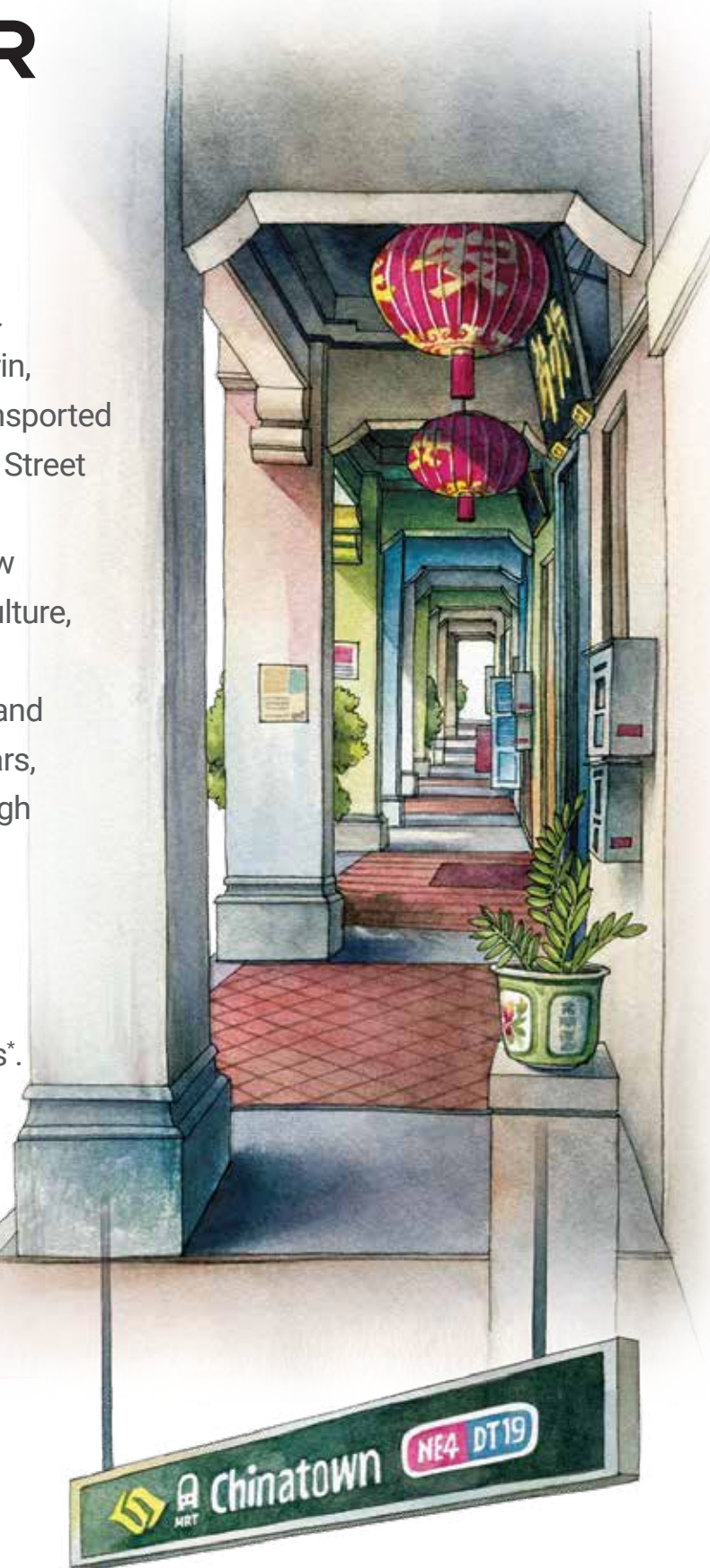
Where heritage, modernity
and cultural diversity meet.

Singapore's Chinatown, also known as 牛车水 *Niu Che Shui*, or bullock water cart in Mandarin, was named after the ox-drawn carts that transported water to the area. Temple Street and Pagoda Street are the most popular spots for a quick visit. But there's a lot more to the place, if you know where to look. Rich in history, heritage and culture, it's the only Chinatown with Chinese and Hindu temples, as well as Muslim mosques and Christian churches, interspersed with cool bars, chic eateries and hidden gems. There's enough to keep you here for an entire day.

This guide helps you understand the historic district of Chinatown better and to venture a little further beyond the beaten five-foot ways*. Enclosed is a useful map with a 6-hour trail that details 14 must-see stops and optional extras, if you want more.

**The five-foot way was meant to protect pedestrians from the sun and rain. But enterprising traders and craftsmen turned these sheltered walkways into sites for thriving small businesses like mask makers, letter writers, barbers, food vendors and even fortune tellers.*

Start your day early at the Chinatown MRT station. Take "Exit A" to Pagoda Street. Once you're out, turn left and the first stop is just a few minutes away. If you're arriving by taxi, ask to be dropped off at the South Bridge Road taxi stand (D16) outside Sri Mariamman Temple.



Get more out of your Chinatown experience with
the Visit Singapore Travel Guide app.



1 Chinatown Heritage Centre

48 Pagoda Street, Singapore 059207 | Daily 9.30am–6.30pm

| 1-min walk from Chinatown MRT Station (Exit A to Pagoda Street)

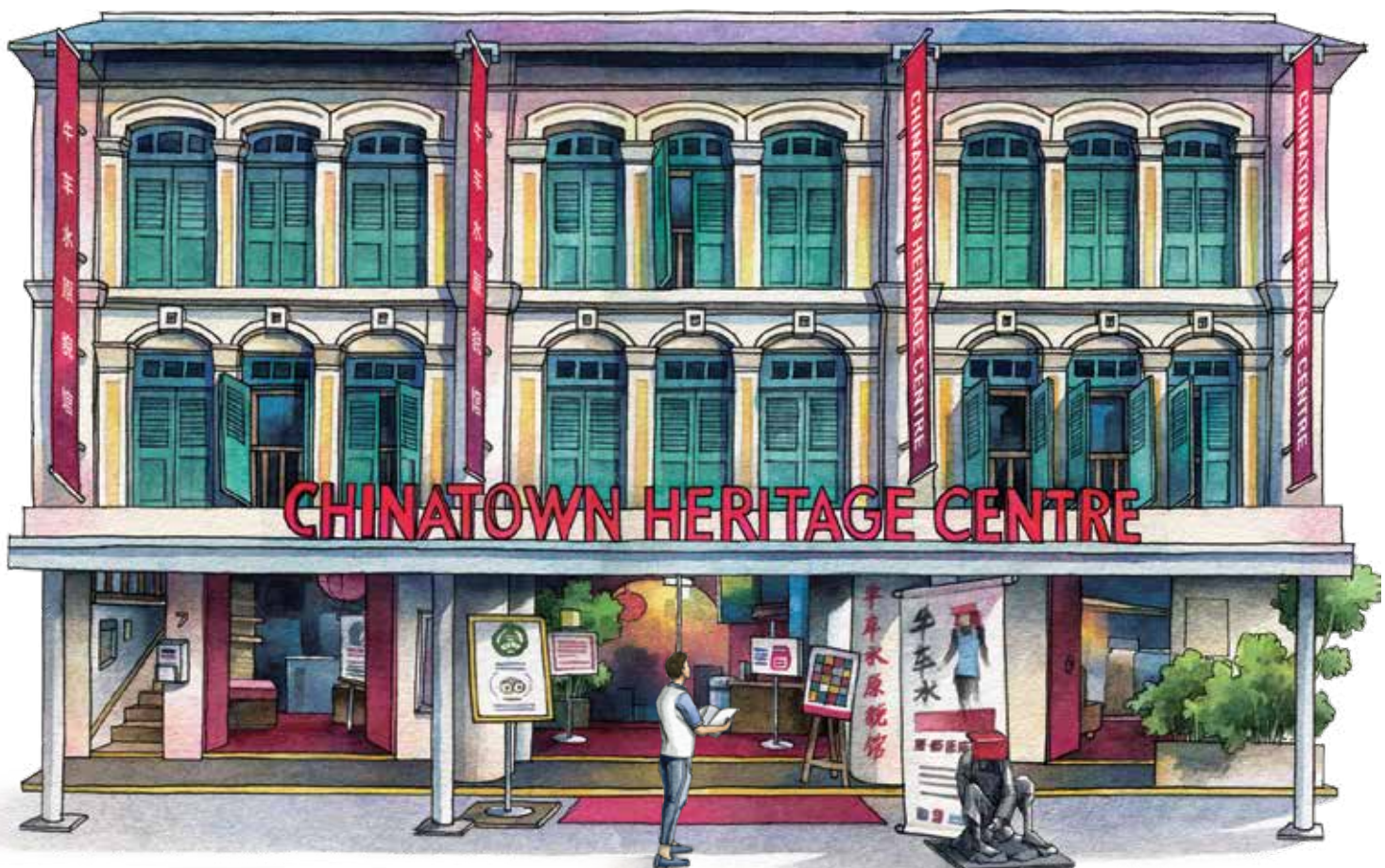
| Please refer to the Chinatown Heritage Centre Facebook page for closings due to Public Holidays or maintenance. |

On the outside, it looks like just another shophouse. Step inside and you'll be transported back in time when Singapore was just a seaport where poverty, hard labour and grim living conditions were the norm.

There are immersive audio tours and interactive exhibits to help you retrace the footsteps of migrants in the late 19th century. Back then, Chinatown was infamously filled with seedy brothels, squalid opium houses, illegal gambling dens and notorious secret societies.

The Chinatown Heritage Centre is also the only place in Singapore where you'll find the original interiors of its shophouse tenants in the 1950s. An actual tailor shop and the living quarters of Singapore's early settlers have been authentically conserved to provide an intimate glimpse into their lives. Discover the personal stories of people who made this shophouse their home, and you'll walk away with a better understanding of Singapore's Chinatown.

Recommended duration: 1hr 40 mins



2 Sri Mariamman Temple

244 South Bridge Road, Singapore 058793 | Daily 5.30am–noon, 6–9pm | Please adhere to the temple's dress code (e.g. no exposed shoulders or revealing outfits) and remove your footwear before entering. |

Founded in 1827 by Narayana Pillay (the first Indian to set foot in Singapore), this temple was dedicated to *Mariamman*, the goddess known for curing illnesses and diseases. It's the largest and oldest Hindu temple in Singapore, and it has played an important role in the Hindu community. In the 1800s, it was a place of refuge for new immigrants to stay until they found work and accommodation.

Theemithi (fire-walking ceremony) is its most important festival since 1840. Legend has it that *Draupathi* – heroine of the epic poem, the *Mahabharata* – had to prove her virtuousness by walking barefoot over hot coals. It's believed that virtuous devotees will also be unharmed when they cross the coals.

You would think that Pagoda Street was named after a Chinese pagoda. But it was, in fact, inspired by the majestic *gopuram* (grand tower) at the temple's entrance. Early Chinese immigrants used its towering prominence as a meeting point,

and that's how the street got its name. Its six-tiered tower – covered with sculptures of gods, goddesses and mythological beasts – is a sight to behold. More than just an ornate landmark, this temple is also a national monument.

Recommended duration: 15 mins



3 Masjid Jamae (Chulia)

218 South Bridge Road, Singapore 058767 | Saturday–Thursday 10am–6pm, Friday 10am–noon, 2.30–6pm
 | Please adhere to the mosque's dress code (e.g. no exposed shoulders or revealing outfits) and remove your footwear before entering. Robes are available for visitors at the entrance of the mosque. Please contact the staff for assistance. |

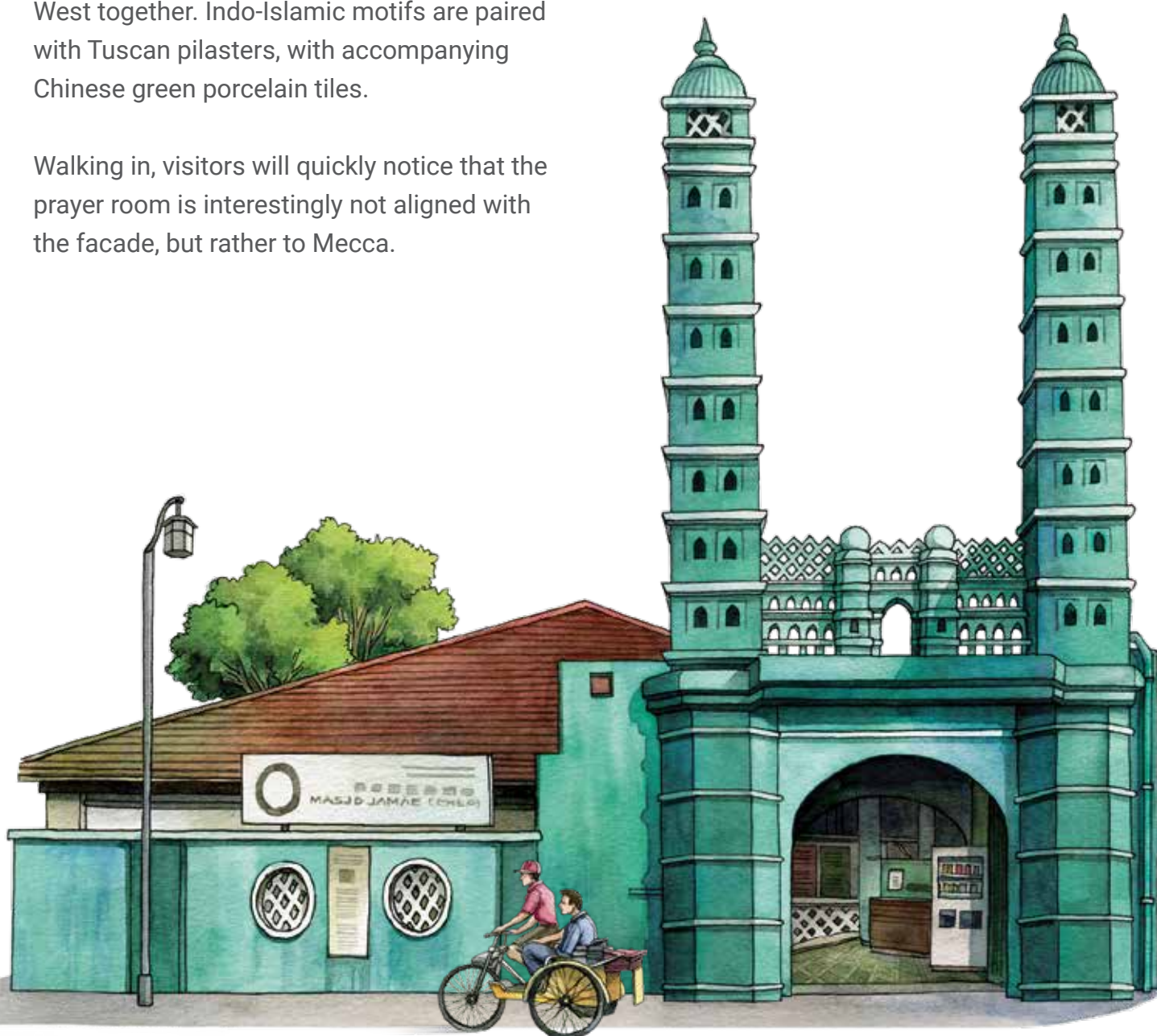
First established in 1826, the Masjid Jamae mosque is unique in many ways. As one of the oldest mosques in Singapore, it's also one of the only six in the country that regularly conducts sermons in Tamil.

Designed by Irish architect George Coleman and completed in 1835, the mosque cleverly fuses architectural features from the East and West together. Indo-Islamic motifs are paired with Tuscan pilasters, with accompanying Chinese green porcelain tiles.

Walking in, visitors will quickly notice that the prayer room is interestingly not aligned with the facade, but rather to Mecca.

For a more in-depth experience, approach the mosque's Dawah Officer who will happily answer any questions about the building and even Islam in general.

Recommended duration: 15 mins



4 Mural at Mohamed Ali Lane



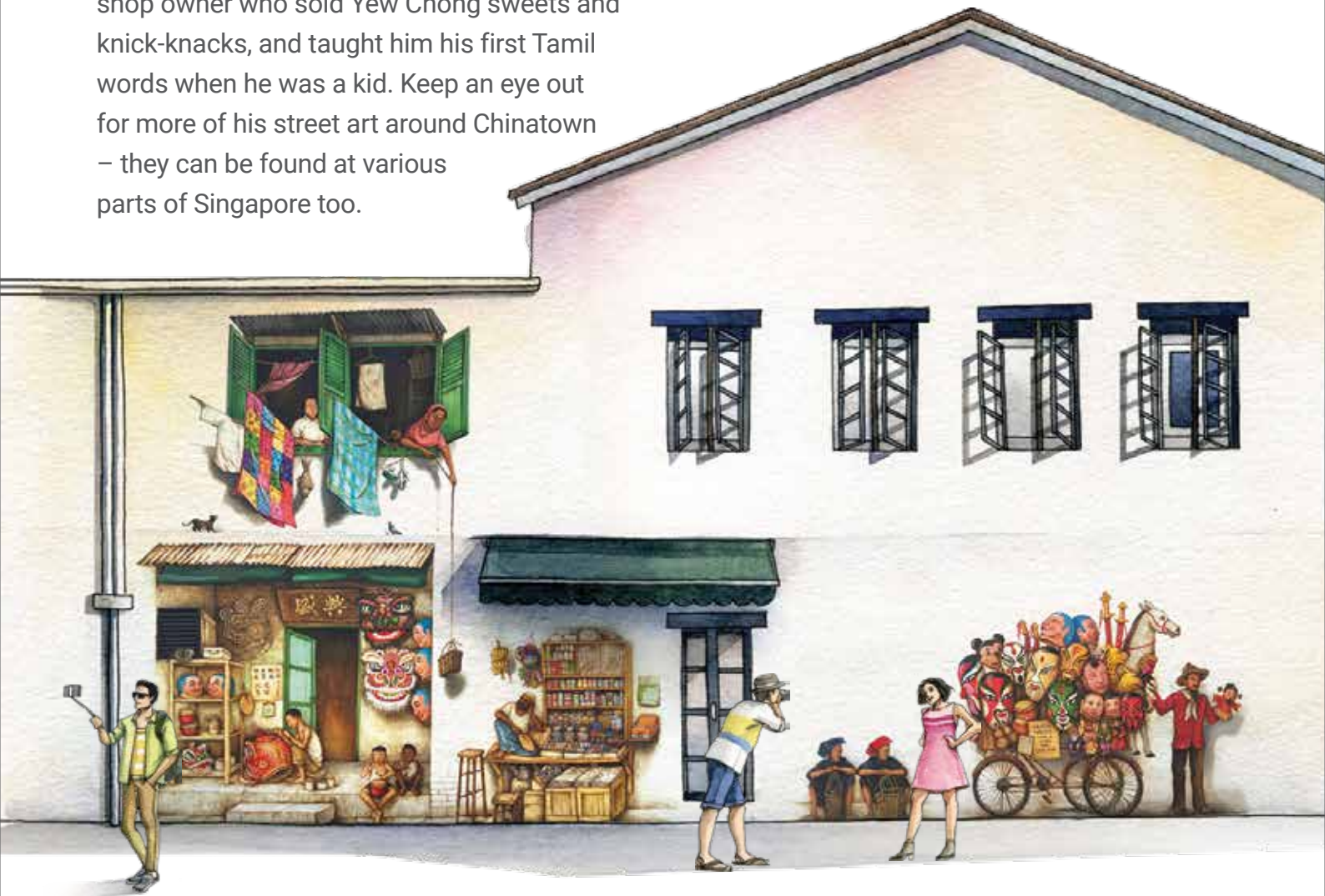
Mohamed Ali Lane. On the side wall of House 227, South Bridge Road

Fascinating wall murals have been mushrooming all over the city in recent years, thanks to Singaporean artists like **Yip Yew Chong**. His work isn't just Instagram-worthy, it's turning roads, like this one in Chinatown, into street museums.

Yew Chong painted these murals from his personal memories of Singapore's past – he grew up in Sago Lane, a street across the road. **The Paper Mask & Puppet Seller** (on the right) was inspired by a real person who sold masks on this very street. And the Indian man in **The Mamak Store** (on the left) was a shop owner who sold Yew Chong sweets and knick-knacks, and taught him his first Tamil words when he was a kid. Keep an eye out for more of his street art around Chinatown – they can be found at various parts of Singapore too.



Recommended duration: 10 mins



5 Tong Heng



285 South Bridge Road, Singapore 058833 | Daily 9am–9pm |

Tong Heng is one of Singapore's oldest confectioneries. The founder's success is a story of resilience, determination and resourcefulness – the quintessential spirit of early Singapore. Though Fong Chee Heng arrived in 1901 as a coolie (unskilled labourer) from China, he managed to save enough funds for a pushcart to peddle coffee around Chinatown during the 1920s. By the 1930s, he had his own coffee shop at 33 Smith Street. Today, it's in a bigger, revamped shop just across the road. Have a bite of the legendary egg tart, and you'll see why the business is still going strong after more than 100 years.



Recommended duration: 25 mins



6 Buddha Tooth Relic Temple & Museum



288 South Bridge Road, Singapore 058840 | Buddhist Culture Museum and Relic Chamber: **Daily 9am–6pm**
 | Eminent Sangha Museum: **Daily 7am–7pm** | Admission to the temple and weekly guided tours are free of charge
 | Please adhere to the temple's dress code (e.g. no exposed shoulders or revealing outfits) when visiting. |

The Buddha Tooth Relic Temple & Museum is a Tang-style Chinese Buddhist Temple. The name is derived from what Buddhists regard as the left canine tooth of Buddha. Recovered from his funeral pyre in Kushinagar, India, it's now displayed on its grounds. The sacred relic is housed in a giant stupa that weighs an amazing 3500 kilogrammes – made from 320 kilogrammes of gold, of which

234 kilogrammes were donated by devotees. There are weekly guided tours and talks to help you understand the religion and its teachings. Though the temple was built in 2007, its richly designed interiors and comprehensive exhibits tell stories of Buddhist culture over thousands of years old.

Recommended duration: 40 mins |



7 Sago Street

Sago Street, Singapore 059012
Next to the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple & Museum

While this area may have gotten its name from the sago factories located here during the 1840s, it was more famous for the Chinese death houses that were along the neighbouring Sago Lane*.

As most early immigrants were here without their family, the dying would come and live out their last days on the upper floors of the death house – while funerals were held right

below, on the ground floor. Though it was known as “street of the dead”, it was anything but quiet. You would hear priests chanting scriptures, and see mourners burning paper effigies in huge bonfires. And the street was also teeming with food stalls that catered to visitors and mourners during the day and through the night.

Recommended duration: 10 mins



*A view of the old Sago Lane.



8 Souvenirs



Grab the ubiquitous fridge magnets, if you must. But save some luggage space for stuff even the locals love. Choose from an assortment of traditional goods and home-grown brands while you're here.

8A Kele Pineapple Tarts (2 Smith Street)

serves delicious pineapple tarts that are hard to resist. Alternatively, visit

8B Tai Chong Kok Pastries (34 Sago Street)

and try their signature mooncakes (sweet pastries traditionally eaten during the Mid-Autumn Festival).

Enjoy a quick pick-me-up with coffee from

8C Nanyang Old Coffee (268 South Bridge Road)

or purchase quaint tea sets from

8D Pek Sin Choon (36 Mosque Street).

Pick up a beautiful piece of jade jewellery at

8E On Cheong Jewellery (251 South Bridge Road)

or, if you prefer gold, drop by

8F Poh Heng Jewellery (People's Park Complex, 1 Park Road).

For traditional Chinese medicine, visit

8G Yue Hwa (70 Eu Tong Sen Street),

8H Thye Shan (201 New Bridge Road),

or the 140-year-old **8J Eu Yan Sang (273 South Bridge Road).**

Bak kwa (barbecued meat slices) is a must-have during the Lunar New Year and some of the best can be found at

8K Lim Chee Guan (203 New Bridge Road),

8L Kim Joo Guan (257 South Bridge Road) and

8M Bee Cheng Hiang (189 New Bridge Road).

For a truly unique Chinatown souvenir, head to the **Chinatown Heritage Centre (48 Pagoda Street)** and get charming dioramas depicting classic local scenes or some prints by award-winning illustrator Patrick Yee.

Recommended duration: >15 mins



9 Chinatown Visitor Centre



2 Banda Street, Singapore 059962 | Daily 9am–9pm | Behind Buddha Tooth Relic Temple & Museum
| Tourist Enquiries | Sale of Merchandise | Sightseeing & Walking Tours | Internet Access & Free WiFi |

More than just an information centre, the Chinatown Visitor Centre is also the starting point for those looking to delve deeper into the rich culture and history of Chinatown. With a wide range of specially designed walking tours conducted every day, there's definitely something for everyone – from the culture vulture to the foodie.

Visit quaint medical halls and shops selling ceremonial items on the Chinese Custom

Walking Tour, or get a taste of tradition with a local breakfast and a trip to a wet market on the Food Walking Tour. When you're done, don't forget to pick up a memento of your time in Chinatown with exclusive souvenirs that are available only in Singapore.

Recommended duration: 10 mins



10 Chinatown Food Street

Smith Street | Daily 11am–11pm |

Experience a multiracial food culture through speciality dishes from main Chinese dialects and the different races in Singapore.

Examples include:

Food Street Fried Kway Teow Mee

A dish of Teochew origins, *char kway teow* (炒粿条; *chao guo tiao* in Mandarin) is a dish of flat rice noodles and yellow wheat noodles fried in garlic, sweet soya sauce and lard, with ingredients such as egg, Chinese waxed sausage, fishcake, beansprouts and cockles.

Teh Tarik Times

Teh tarik (pulled milk tea) is a tea that is 'pulled' from one cup to another at varying heights of up to one metre – this cools it down and creates its trademark frothy cap. Pair it with some of the specialities here like *roti prata* (South Indian flatbread) or *dum briyani*, an Indian spiced rice dish cooked with savoury chicken, mutton or fish.



Newton Circus

Ahmad Ibrahim Satay

Satay is a dish similar to kebabs – made of cubes of skewered meat that is grilled and eaten with a peanut sauce dip. Tracing its origins to the Arabs, *satay* has been adapted to the multicultural palates of Asians, with various spicy sauces and different ways of marinating the meat.

Recommended duration: 45 mins



11 Chinatown Complex

335 Smith Street, Singapore 050335

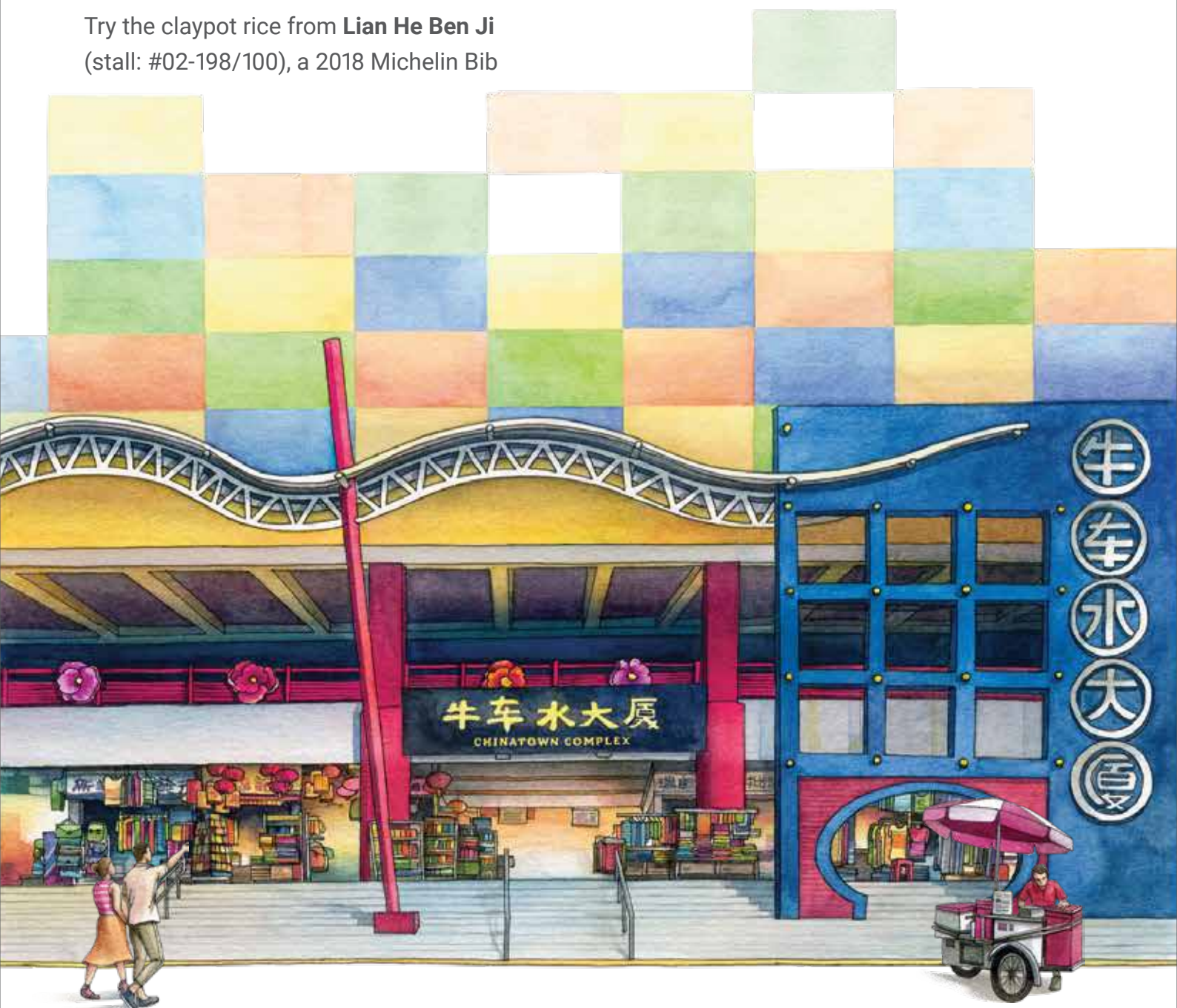


Street hawkers used to ply their trade in pushcarts all over Chinatown. Though they provided affordable food, these hawkers caused problems like poor hygiene and congested traffic. Chinatown Complex was built to clean up the area and help them resettle in a new place – without losing the district's unique character.

Try the claypot rice from **Lian He Ben Ji** (stall: #02-198/100), a 2018 Michelin Bib

Gourmand recipient. At **Pan Ji Cooked Food** (stall: #02-078) you'll find the last *sachima* (deep-fried egg dough glazed with malted sugar) maker in Singapore to still make this delicious treat by hand. And don't miss **Smith Street Taps** (stall: #02-062) for delicious craft beers from all over the world.

Recommended duration: 45 mins



12 Nam's Supplies



22 Smith Street, Singapore 058936 | Daily 8am–7pm |

The burning of paper offerings, or effigies, is very much a part of Chinese funeral rituals. While the original purpose was to show that material possessions could not be brought into the afterlife, it has since evolved to today's belief that belongings can be brought into the netherworld.

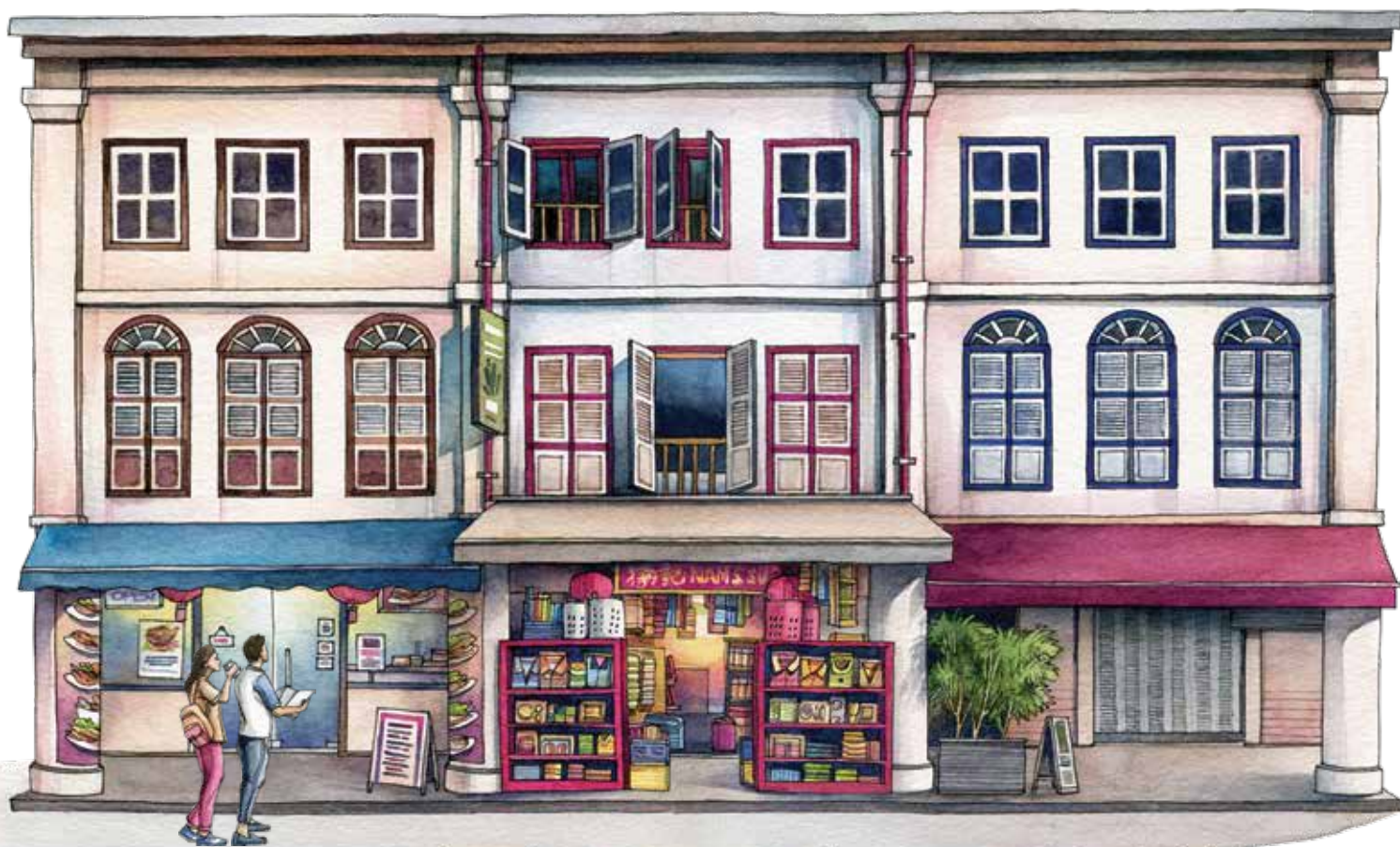
In the past, paper offerings were based on necessities like clothes, money and gold ingots. Today, fancier options like

diamond-encrusted watches, life-sized supercars and the latest smartphones are burned instead. For the ultimate high (after) life, there are even state-of-the-art mansions, chauffeur-driven luxury cars and private jets – all made of paper. See them up close at Nam's Supplies, where they have been in business at the "street of the dead" since 1934.

Recommended duration: 10 mins

To get to the next destination in the Telok Ayer neighbourhood, head to Chinatown MRT Station and take a train on the Downtown line to Telok Ayer MRT Station. It's just one train stop away.

NE4 DT19 >>>> DT18
Chinatown Telok Ayer





13 Thian Hock Keng Temple

158 Telok Ayer Street, Singapore 068613 | 5-min walk from Telok Ayer MRT Station |

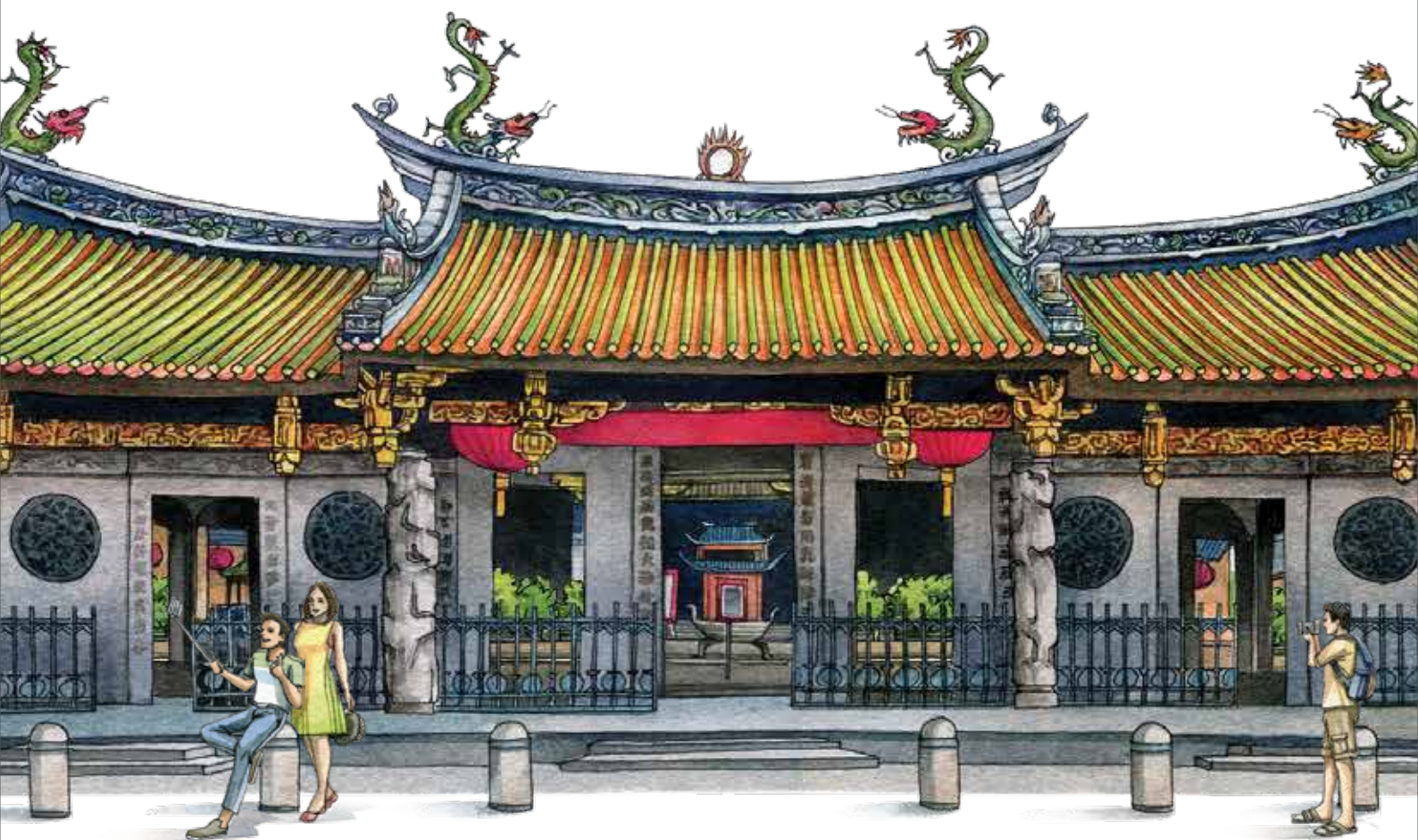
This architectural masterpiece was built without a single nail, and is one of the oldest and most important Hokkien temples in Singapore. But it all started as a little makeshift shrine at the shoreline of Telok Ayer Basin in 1821 (now Telok Ayer Street).

In the early 19th century, thousands of Chinese immigrants risked their lives to escape extreme poverty in their home villages by undertaking a treacherous sea journey to Singapore. When they arrived, they would give thanks to Mazu (Goddess known to be a protector of seafarers) at the shrine which eventually became Thian Hock Keng (Temple of Heavenly Happiness) in 1839.

A major restoration led to an honourable mention in the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage 2001 Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. Thian Hock Keng Temple and Chong Wen Ge (the pavilion next door) were gazetted collectively as a national monument.

Go to the back of the temple (exterior wall) to see an outstanding, 44-metre mural by Yip Yew Chong. It's a visual story of Singapore's early immigrants from China. It starts from the right, like how traditional Chinese books are written.

Recommended duration: 20 mins



14 My Awesome Café



202 Telok Ayer Street, Singapore 068639 | Daily 9am–midnight |

This retro-themed café is housed in a place steeped in history and heritage. In 1952, this was the location where Chinese volunteer physicians set up the Telok Ayer Chung Hwa Free Clinic for people who could not afford medical care. The café kept the clinic's original facade, so look out for the words, 院醫華中*, emblazoned on the building's frontage.



Its rich history, excellent menu, and iconic facade make it an awesome place to end your walking trail of a Chinatown like no other.

**Chinese was traditionally written from right to left, hence the signboard is meant to be read: 中華醫院.*

Recommended duration: 30 mins



Chinatown after dark



Stay for dinner in Chinatown, and watch its charming streets transform into hip hangouts – with some of the country's best bars and restaurants. The list featured in the following pages barely scratches the surface, so let your epicurean adventures begin!

If you're in the **Telok Ayer** area, **The Coconut Club** is a Michelin Bib Gourmand establishment for authentic and affordable local food. If you want something a little fancier and more romantic, head over to **PS. Café**. Alternatively, stroll along Club Street and you'll find cuisines from all around the world – from Laotian to Greek.

The **Bukit Pasoh** neighbourhood is another enclave of culinary treasures and cool watering holes, including the Michelin-starred restaurants **Meta**, **Burnt Ends**, and **Zén**. Even the old-school eating house, **Kok Sen**, is on the Michelin Bib Gourmand list. For after-dinner drinks, check

out the rooftop bar at **Potato Head Singapore**. Or try the unconventional craft cocktails at **Gibson**, and you'll see why this vintage-inspired cocktail parlour is on the list of Asia's 50 Best Bars. Its sister bar – **Flagship** – is on the ground floor of the same building, if you're in the mood for rock music and dive bar vibes.



Recommended spots for food and drinks

Telok Ayer

- A The Coconut Club**
28 Ann Siang Road, Singapore 069708
A Michelin Bib Gourmand establishment, this restaurant spent two years perfecting their *nasi lemak* (rice cooked in coconut milk) recipe and you can taste it in every bite.
- B PS. Café**
45 Ann Siang Road, #02-02, Singapore 069719
Perfect for a casual brunch, romantic dinner and everything in between, PS. Café's picture-perfect dishes taste as good as they look.
- C Amoy Street Food Centre**
7 Maxwell Road, Singapore 069111
Its popularity with office workers during lunch is a testament to the quality of hawker fare here, which include several Michelin Bib Gourmand winners.
- D Maxwell Food Centre**
1 Kadayannallur Street, Singapore 069184
This centre has played host to culinary luminaries such as Gordon Ramsay and the late Anthony Bourdain. Try the local dishes – especially the chicken rice – here.
- E Native**
52A Amoy Street, Singapore 069878
Ranked #13 on the World's 50 Best Bars list in 2018, this unique bar takes inspiration and ingredients from around the region, from turmeric to tapioca.
- F Bitters and Love**
118 Telok Ayer Street, Singapore 068587
This bar is hard to find, and even harder to forget. Try one of their signature cocktails, or let the barman create one specially for you.
- G Nouri** ✨
72 Amoy Street, Singapore 069891
Sample the unique flavours of "crossroads cooking" at this Michelin-starred restaurant by chef-owner Ivan Brehm.

Recommended spots for food and drinks

Bukit Pasoh

- H** **Potato Head Singapore**
36 Keong Saik Road, Singapore 089143
As the first international branch of the famed Potato Head Beach Club in Bali, this place offers 4 floors of fun and dining. Don't forget to check out the rooftop bar!
- J** **Meta** ✨
1 Keong Saik Road, Singapore 089109
Chef Sun Kim's diverse experience is showcased at this Michelin-starred restaurant that serves classic French-inspired cuisine with an Asian twist.
- K** **Burnt Ends** ✨
20 Teck Lim Road, Singapore 088391
If you love seeing your dinner cooked to perfection in front of you over a coal-fired grill, this Michelin-starred restaurant certainly won't disappoint.
- L** **Zén** ✨✨
41 Bukit Pasoh Road, Singapore 089855
This intimate, Michelin-starred restaurant helmed by lauded Swedish chef Björn Frantzén promises to deliver a more fun and relaxed spin on the traditional fine dining experience.
- M** **Kok Sen**
30 Keong Saik Road, Singapore 089137
Currently run by third-generation owners, this Michelin Bib Gourmand-winning restaurant still boasts high quality *zichar* (traditional dishes influenced by home-cooked Chinese food) at affordable prices.
- N** **Gibson/Flagship**
20 Bukit Pasoh Road, Singapore 089834
Ranked one of Asia's 50 Best Bars for four years running, this intimate establishment serves unique cocktails, including their namesake and signature, the Gibson. In the same building, you'll also find Flagship, its sister bar.
- P** **Tong Ah Eating House**
35 Keong Saik Road, Singapore 089142
For a truly local breakfast, visit this institution and order some traditional crispy *kaya* (a traditional jam made from coconut and egg) toast, soft-boiled eggs, and local coffee.
- Q** **Keong Saik Bakery**
41 Keong Saik Road, Singapore 089146
Enjoy the best of both worlds at this intimate café that puts a contemporary touch to traditional cakes and pastries.
- R** **Man Man Japanese Unagi Restaurant**
1 Keong Saik Road, Singapore 089109
Unagi (freshwater eel) fans will enjoy the intimate vibe of this small restaurant, as well as the quality of the eels imported straight from Mikawa Isshiki.
- S** **Afterglow**
24 Keong Saik Road, Singapore 089131
With a wide variety of inventive and tasty dishes, this restaurant aims to combat the perception of raw vegan food as bland and boring.

Extra stops if you don't want to miss out on anything

Telok Ayer

- T** **Ann Siang Hill Well**
Next to 78 Club Street, Singapore 069447
In the 19th and 20th centuries, ox-drawn carts brought water drawn from wells such as this to Kreta Ayer (“water cart” in Malay), which is how the district got its name.
- U** **Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre**
140 Telok Ayer Street, Singapore 068604
Indian Muslim culture and heritage come to life for visitors through artefacts and engaging multimedia displays.

Bukit Pasoh

- V** **Kong Chow Wui Koon**
321 New Bridge Road, Singapore 088758
One of the oldest Chinese clan associations in Singapore. Learn more about Chinese culture and heritage through exhibitions and demonstrations here.
- W** **Siong Leng Musical Association**
4B Bukit Pasoh Road, Singapore 089818
Learn about *Nanyin* and *Liyuan* Opera here and discover how the group is working to promote and preserve these ancient art forms.
- X** **Grassroots Book Room**
25 Bukit Pasoh Road, Singapore 089839
Stop by this prominent Chinese bookstore and browse books from acclaimed local and foreign authors or grab a drink at the on-site café.



**Passion
Made
Possible**