

Little India Walkabout 1

(by www.myonlinetour.com)



Inside Little India MRT, you will find the Art on *Memoirs of the Past* by S Chandrasekaran. The artist drew his inspiration from Indian folk art & the daily rituals of Singapore Indians such as traditional floor art used to adorn the entrance to a home. These ornate motifs & stylised paintings are showcased in the metal grilles at the station entrances & the elaborate floor works in bronze & granite at the concourse & platform levels of the station. Through paintings of animals on wall & pillar panels, the artist salutes the history of Kandang Kerbau, the area around the station whose name means 'Buffalo Stables' in Malay, a reminder of the cattle-rearing days here.

[Exit at Little India MRT, Exit B, to start your walkabout on the right.]

Kandang Kerbau Hospital (1), the birthplace of over 1.2 million Singaporeans, was the largest maternity hospital in the world from the 1950s to the early 1970s. The hospital, commonly known as "KK" or "Tek Kah" served as the national maternity hospital of Singapore from 1924 to 1997. It now housed the Land Transport Authority - Projects & Engineering Office. KK Hospital was first built in 1858 - See the Historic Site Storyboard for more information.

[This hospital was in the Guinness Book of Records, what was the record?]

Serangoon Road (2) is one of the oldest roads, completed by 1828, probably by Indian convict labourers. In fact, this road was marked on ancient maps as "The Road Through the Island".

In Hokkien, "tekka" means, "the foot of bamboo shoots", reminding us of the early bamboos growing in abundance by the Rochor River. In Mandarin called "Zhujiào". The original produce market that once stood across Serangoon Road was called Kandang Kerbau Market. When the K K Market closed down, the stalls were relocated to **Tekka Centre (3)**, built in 1981. Besides the market, there is also a hawker centre. Climb up the stairs to discover clothing, brassware and antique stalls on the next floor. From bedspreads to quaint knick-knacks, you will find virtually everything here.

[From the main staircase of Tekka Centre facing the bus-stop, across the road is Hastings Road. This road was named after Warren Hastings, a British colonial administrator working for the East India Company and the Governor-General of Bengal.]

About Jewellery:-

Jewellery shops selling gold jewellery in Indian designs. Traditionally, Indian goldsmiths were well-respected as they were also the image-makers of the gods.

Today, many of these goldsmiths are still true Indian craftsmen, creating jewellery from ancient patterns. However, some of these shops are run by Chinese businessmen now. In these shops, you can see *navarethinam*, a ring encrusted with nine different gems, each representing the nine visible planets including the sun and the moon. Usually worn by Indian men, the ring counteracts the influences of the planets. Interestingly, Indian ladies buy ear-rings that screw clockwise, a direction associated with things positive and good by the Hindus. To the Indians, elephant hair is believed to bring good luck and is often found embedded in gold rings for both sexes. In fact, devotees can even buy small silver representations of body parts and offer them to temples to heal pain in their bodies. The temples then resell them to fund the temples.

Buffalo Road (4) & Kerbau Road – "Kerbau" means "buffalo" in Malay. The cattle trade & slaughterhouses were located along these streets.



Art Deco Style Architectural

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Tan Tang Niah's House (37 Kerbau Road) (5). This bungalow was erected around 1905 by a Jewish cattle trader and later sold to and renovated by a Chinese family. In the middle of this Late Shophouse Style (see last page for Architectural Styles) building stands a staircase whose banisters are adorned with golden dragon heads. Among the family's children was Tan Sim Boh. During World War II, he raised funds for the war effort in China & campaigned for the boycott of Japanese goods in Singapore. Tan evacuated Singapore before the Japanese invaded, but died when they sank his ship off Pompong Island in Riau. This house was once called "Elegant Pine" which symbolized the Chinese virtue – endurance.

[Find the Storyboard. What is the meaning of 'slew song'?]

Along **3-33 Kerbau Road** (6), this row of 16 two-storey shophouses is of the Art Deco Style. The ground floors were once used as cattle-sheds. These units were restored by URA in 1998.

[Belilios Lane & Belilios Road - I. R. Belilios, a Venetian Jew, was a wealthy cattle merchant who arrived here from Calcutta in the mid-1880s. He was the first importer of livestock for local slaughter and is credited with commercializing the cattle and sheep trade.]

Cross Serangoon Road at the traffic light and make your way to the **Little India Arcade** (7) situated directly opposite the Tekka Centre bus-stop, 48 Serangoon Road. This site was once a Hindu burial and cremation ground. This cluster of shophouses, dated back to 1920's, was conserved in 1982 and later turned into this bustling shopping haven. Look out for Handlooms, a *sari/saree* shop supported by the Government of India, facing the bus-stop. These pre-war shophouses of the Art Deco Style have been a focal point for the Indian community since the 19th century. The buildings were originally three separate blocks with backlanes. After, restoration, the backlanes were turned into open-air passageways linking the shops, thus creating a bazaar atmosphere.

Enter from the Serangoon Road entrance and you'll see a confectionery selling traditional Indian sweets and snacks. Try desserts like *gulab jamun*, cream cheese balls in syrup. Little India is a good place to get some body art done using *henna*. Henna is a type of leaf that is dried, grounded and used as a natural dye to create intricate designs, traditionally on the palms of a bride. Don't forget to walk into the many Indian craft shops and booths to discover the exciting mix of carvings, sculptures, brassware and artefacts. Pause to admire the Hindu images while shopping for aromatic incense sticks, pretty drapes and covers for your home.



About Saree:-

The *saree* is actually a single piece of fabric of about a metre in width and five and a half metres in length, draped around the body of a woman and tied like a pleated skirt with one end of the fabric thrown over the shoulder. With the saree, the woman wears a *choli*, a short-fitting blouse. Taking a closer look at the more elaborate fabrics, you will see real gold and silver threads woven into them. You may even wish to purchase the sari fabric to be tailored into modern dresses.

[No. 39 Campbell Lane is the First Transitional Shophouse Style.]

About Campbell Lane:-

It was named after Sir Colin Campbell Baron Clyde (1792-1863), a Scottish field marshal and was responsible for ending the Indian Mutiny in 1857 which led to the transfer of Singapore to the colonial office's (in London) control in 1867. This area is where cows were once slaughtered for beef. This activity was done by Indian Muslims as cows are considered sacred to Hindus.



First Transitional Shophouse Style

Walk down the narrow five-foot ways (are five-foot corridors outside shops) & discover shops packed with Indian furniture, carvings in wood and brass as well as musical instruments, also shops selling statues of various deities and prayer altars. Shophouses are often painted pink or green to signify good fortune and spring respectively.

Along Campbell Lane outside GGS Publication (where interesting cultural story booklets could be found too), somewhere at the middle, side of Little India Arcade, you will see a Storyboard of **Mr P. Govindasamy Pillai** (8), affectionately known to all as "PGP". His rags-to-riches life story has inspired the imagination of even newly arrived Indian migrant. When he became successful in establishing his textiles and sarees shops, PGP became Little India's most generous philanthropist. Most Hindu temples in Little India today were beneficiaries of this man's great heart.

[How much did he have on hand when he arrived in Singapore in 1905?]

Look out for vividly coloured flower shops selling garlands and fresh flowers. Flowers play an important role in the Indian way of life, as they are a symbol of prosperity. Watch the garland-makers deftly weave their red, yellow and white flower creations from roses, marigolds and the flower of happiness, jasmine. These colours are especially significant as they symbolise love, peace and purity respectively.



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More About Flowers:-

On Tuesdays & Fridays, the Hindu holy days, gods are honoured with simple strands of flowers. But on religiously significant days, more elaborate strands are ordered and placed on the deities in the temple and at home. It is common to see ladies adorn their hair with flowers. A widow is not allowed to wear flowers as she is expected to remove ornaments, and other items that beautify her. In Hindu culture, people are garlanded as a show of respect and welcome. Interestingly, men usually garland men, and women garland women except when the couple is married. Then the husband garlands his wife and vice versa.



Pop into the different provision and textile shops along **Dunlop Street** (9). You could also find a curious variety of products ranging from special Indian cosmetics such as *kohl*, *henna* dyes and perfumed oils, to an interesting mix of textile and Indian dress shops.

Nos 127 and 159 Dunlop Street are Early Shophouse Style.



Early Shophouse Style Architectural

Dunlop Street is another road with European name. This was a private road that led from Serangoon Road to the residence of Mr A. E. Dunlop, one of the colony's distinguished citizens in the 1840s. He was secretary and an active committee member of the Racecourse in Little India. His residence has since vanished.



Abdul Gaffoor Mosque (10). While most Indians are Hindus, some follow the Muslim faith. On Fridays, many will congregate here for prayers. Originally a wooden structure built on land leased by Shaik Abdul Gaffoor bin Shaik Hyder in 1859 and financed through the lease of the shophouses he had built in the 1880s, the mosque was rebuilt in brick in 1910. It now features a glass cupola. When entering the grounds of worship, make sure your legs are covered to the ankles and remember to take off your shoes. Note that only worshippers are allowed to enter the prayer hall. It was declared a national monument in 1979. The mosque boasts a one-of-its-kind sundial decorated with Arabic calligraphy at the main entrance, is testament to this fact.

The Church of True Light (11) - This Anglican church was built in 1951/52. It started off back in 1911 where Ms. Apple, came to Singapore to set up a mission for the Heng Hua and Hock Chew Chinese clans. On the third storey, you'll find a unique sanctuary with a huge Chinese ideogram for the word "love" above the altar. Note the Bible verses in Chinese painted onto the pillars and walls. Look out for a Historic Site Storyboard for more information.

[Who did Ms. Apple enlisted the help of to set up the mission?]

From the Historic Site Storyboard of The Church of True Light, across the street you should be able to see another Storyboard on 'Streets Named After British Colonial Officials'.

[To whom Birch Road was named after?]

Dickson Road was once a private accessway to the house of Sir Fedrick Dickson, Colonial Secretary of Singapore from 1885 to 1892. Walk towards Upper Dickson Road. Don't miss the shrines at the foot of a sacred banyan tree.



There are a few highly recommended restaurants for **Indian food** (12). The first Indian fast food joint in Singapore, Komalas (picture above). For a different dining experience, have a curry meal with rice and accompanying pulse dishes piled high on a banana leaf. Your cutlery is your hand and it is polite to eat only with your right hand and never with the left, as the left is associated with uncleanliness. Don't worry - if you need to, ask for a fork and spoon and of course, a huge glass of refreshing limejuice.

More About Food:-

Aside from the traditional Indian meals, you may also want to savour Indian Muslim food in one of the many open-fronted coffee shops. Try the tasty *prata*, a crisp-crusty pancake. Catch the prata maker flipping the paper thin dough into the air with his hands, before folding it over and tossing it onto the well-oiled griddle. Look out for the *paan wallah* or betel nut seller with his betel leaves piled high. Mildly narcotic, betel nuts are believed to be good for the digestive system. Pieces of betel nuts, chopped fine or coarse, are mixed with lime paste and sometimes other spices. They are then rolled up in a betel leaf, popped into the mouth and chewed.

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Vegetarianism is associated with religious purity. Hinduism dictates that all animal life should be revered. The cow, in particular, is highly revered as it is the provider of milk and transportation and traditionally served man to till his fields. Try delicious vegetable and pulse curries with either white or saffron-flavoured rice. You can also order delicious Indian breads such as *chapatis*, flat whole-wheat bread served with *dhal* and vegetable, *dhosai*, a chewy rice flour and lentil pancake, or *puris*, deep fried bread served with curry.

Find the spice grinding shop along Cuff Road. The betel nut-chewing **spice grinders** (13) here will grind the spice mixtures or mill flour at your request. Indian families often own unique recipes that are handed down from one generation to another. They believe that spices should be freshly ground on the day of cooking as it releases the true flavour of the meat and vegetables. The shop is closed at night and on Sundays. Cuff Road – J.C. Cuff was an electrical engineer in the Eastern Extension Australia and China Telegraph Co Ltd. His studio was built on this street in 1893.

[Find Second Transitional Shophouse Style architectural at No 15 Cuff Road.]



Second Transitional Shophouse Style

At the end of Cuff Road, on the left you will find **Kampong Kapor Methodist Church** (14). The church was designed by Swan & Maclaren in the style of the Romanesque period in Italy, with a distinctive Spanish/baroque Dutch gable façade. Completed in 1929, it replaced an earlier church, the First Straits Chinese (Baba) Church at Middle Road, when the congregation grew too large. This Church is also known as the Peranakan Methodist Church.



Kampong Kapor Methodist Church

Walk through Veerasamy Road, formerly known as Jalan Tambah, the street was renamed after Dr N. Veerasamy, a Justice of the Peace and leading member of the Indian Community.

Built by indentured Bengali labourers in 1881 on the site of an earlier shrine, **Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple** (15) is dedicated to the Hindu Goddess *Kali*, the consort of *Shiva*. She is known as the Goddess of Power and the name "*Veeramakaliamman*" means "*Kali the Courageous*", a ferocious incarnation of Siva's wife and the goddess who destroyed evil and protects her devotees. The statue of the goddess was shipped from India in 1908.

More About Sri Veeramakalimman Temple:-

On holy days (Tuesdays and Fridays), the streets are busy with devotees on their way to pray, worship and make requests to *Kali* for blessings. This temple is closed between 12.30pm and 4pm everyday. Note that women who are undergoing the monthly cycle are considered "unclean" and are not allowed to enter temple grounds. The main shrine contains a jet black statue of *Kali* with her sons *Ganesha* and *Murugan* on each side. *Kali* is represented as having many pairs of arms and hands, and in her hands, she carries the weapons of destruction. *Ganesha* the elephant god is known as the Remover of Obstacles (God of Wisdom), *Murugan* is often depicted as riding a peacock and his birthday is celebrated by the *Thaipusam* festival.

This spectacular two-day celebration is held during the full moon of the auspicious Hindu month of *Thai*.

During invasion of Singapore, many devotees took refuge here. As you enter the gates of the temple, look up at the *gopuram* or the tower over the temple entrance. Covered with figurative sculptures of gods and goddesses and mythological beasts, this tower is visible from afar so devotees can even say their prayers without stepping inside the temple. Notice strings of mango and coconut leaves hanging above temple doors - they are signs of welcome and purity. Remember to remove your shoes and leave them outside. Did you know this temple didn't have a *gopuram* until 1987?



Gopuram

Devotees also purify themselves by washing their hands and feet, and sprinkling water on their heads, Within the temple compound, remember to walk in a clockwise direction and only encircle the temple hall in an odd number of times as a sign of good luck.

Notice the use of the lotus, a symbol of human life to the Hindus, as a decorative motif. As the lotus bud stretches towards the sun despite its roots being embedded in mud; likewise man strives for the spiritual despite being rooted deeply in nature.

About Architectural Styles:-

Architectural styles ranging from Early (1840-1900), First Transitional, Late (1900-1940) and Second Transitional to Art Deco (1930-1960).

