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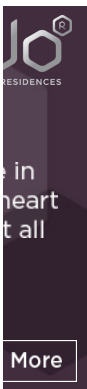
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# Heritage in the heartlands

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*New bus tour features in-depth exploration of Bedok's rich coastal history*

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SINGAPORE — Before the massive land reclamation project in the 1960s permanently extended the eastern coastline of Singapore, the former coastal settlement of Bedok was the very scene of tropical idyll, with beach mansions of the local rich melding with traditional Malay

kampungs and fishing villages set to a backdrop of swaying palm trees and the South China Sea.

Although such a scene is no longer available, this is what people can get a sense of when they sign up for a guided bus tour around the Bedok area. This new heritage trail was officially launched yesterday by the National Heritage Board (NHB) as part of the activities for this year's Singapore HeritageFest (SHF).

Other activities offered this weekend (the second of three on the SHF calendar), which sees focus move from the city centre to the heartlands, include gastronomic tours of areas known for their food offerings, such as Balestier, Joo Chiat, Kampong Glam and Changi.

But of the myriad activities available for heritage buffs, the guided Bedok Heritage Trail stands out as a firm highlight. The bus tour will travel through history-rich sites such as the Frankel and Opera Estates, where Albert Einstein once visited as a guest of the prominent Frankel family; an intact piece of the old sea wall at Upper East Coast Road opposite Laguna Park condominium; and Bedok Corner, the former site of raucous sea regattas featuring koleks (small wooden Malay boats) and seafront kampungs that dotted the shoreline of Singapore's east coast.

It is NHB's 15th heritage trail, spanning over 15km and featuring 10 heritage markers installed at various sites around the area.

"We hope that the trail will raise the awareness of residents and visitors about Bedok's heritage, pique their interest to re-discover key landmarks in the estate, and instil a sense of pride in them when they learn about Bedok's role in Singapore's progress as a nation," said Alvin Tan, NHB's assistant chief executive (Policy & Community).

Added Tan Teng Teng, researcher for the Bedok Heritage Trail: "Bedok was one of the most photographed areas of Singapore (in the earlier part of last century), as its coastal scenery inspired a lot of photographers and filmmakers. The first open-air cinema was in Siglap. Bedok has managed to retain a lot of its character despite being one of the first resettlement zones in Singapore."

Tan added that the discussions with the Housing & Development Board (HDB) and preliminary research for the Bedok Heritage Trail started in 2011, and was developed as part of the HDB's Remaking Our Heartland plans for the East Coast area.

Yesterday also saw the unveiling of a brand-new mobile application titled Singapore Heritage Trails, which was developed by the NHB in collaboration with the Keio-NUS CUTE Center. The latter is a joint collaboration between National University of Singapore and Keio University in Japan to further research in digital interactive media.

The mobile app is a compilation of 80 heritage trails in Singapore developed by community and public agency partners, in addition to those by NHB, such as food-themed and paranormal trails. It also allows users to curate their own trails, and contribute pictures and accounts of their experiences through interactive and geo-tracking features.

"This project is the first attempt to consolidate all of Singapore's heritage trails, and (it) is great for people who are after spontaneity as they are able to locate trails and heritage sites nearby," said Dr Kelvin Cheng, research fellow at the Keio-NUS CUTE Center. Aside from heritage and historical information, the app also features food recommendations. "We wanted to build a platform that is more social and encourage contributions from the public to build on their memories with user-generated content," said Cheng.

Two more heritage trails will be unveiled in the second half of this year; a refreshed trail of Bukit Timah and a brand-new one for Little India.

Added Tan: "We (at the NHB) don't believe in just putting the infrastructure out there; we hope to encourage and foster community engagement and partnership with all of our heritage trails."

The Singapore HeritageFest runs from now until May 15. To register for ticketed events, visit <http://www.heritagefest.sg> (<http://www.heritagefest.sg>).

Heritage in the Heartlands: Get to know the rich history of Bedok's coastline

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