

# *Your Guide to* **Pioneers Trail** in Ann Siang Hill Park and Telok Ayer Green

The Ann Siang Hill area is a quiet enclave amid the hustle and bustle of Chinatown. Meander through brightly coloured shophouses and gain insight into the lives of Singapore's early immigrants.

Ann Siang Hill has an interesting history. Located beside the former Telok Ayer Bay, it was one of three hills (the others being Mount Wallich and Mount Erskine, which were eventually levelled) collectively known as Telok Ayer Hills. It also had its name changed twice, having been owned by three different people – the last of whom was the wealthy Malacca-born landowner Chia Ann Siang.

In the 1800s, one of Singapore's earliest Cantonese Chinese burial grounds was located at the foot of this hill. A Malay school was also situated on the hill to provide education to the son of the Temenggong of Johor and other young members of royalty.

While on this trail, remember to visit the various places of worship built in the 1800s that coexisted peacefully in the same area. Stop by Telok Ayer Green for historical information on the trade and way of life in early Singapore. As you walk along the two roads on the hill – Ann Siang Road and Ann Siang Hill – look at the old and restored shophouses that once housed several Chinese clans and associations. Spice up your walk by looking out for different tree species at Ann Siang Hill Park, in particular, the tamarind, cinnamon, nutmeg and breadfruit trees.



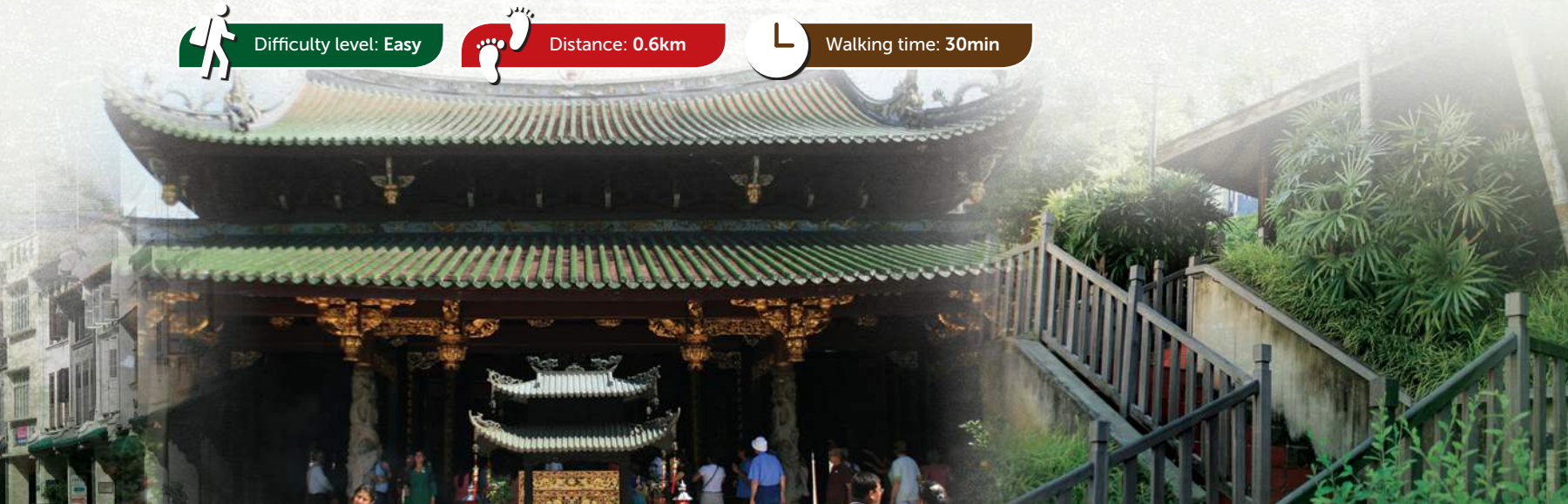
Difficulty level: Easy



Distance: 0.6km



Walking time: 30min







14 Cinnamon



13 Nutmeg



11 Old Well



9 Ann Siang Hill Park



7 Amoy Street



6 Telok Ayer Green



4 Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre



15 Club Street



3 Thian Hock Keng Temple



1 Telok Ayer Street

**Legend**

- Tarmac Road
- Track
- Building
- Carpark
- Toilet
- Restaurant
- Shelter
- Pergola
- Sheltered Walkway
- Gazebo
- MRT Station



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1. Telok Ayer Street



2. Yellow Rain Tree



3. Thian Hock Keng Temple



4. Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre

### ▶ 2 Yellow Rain Tree

[*Samanea saman* (yellow leaves)]

Two Yellow Rain Trees stand sentinel in front of Telok Ayer Green. The leaves are yellow, a variant from the usual green, as a result of genetic influence.

The Rain Tree is commonly planted along Singapore's roads for the shade its large, umbrella-shaped crown casts over surrounding areas. Its leaves often fold up at dusk or before a rainstorm, hence its name.



5. Al-Abrar Mosque

### ▶ 3 Thian Hock Keng Temple

You are looking at the oldest Chinese temple in Singapore. Also known as the 'Temple of Heavenly Happiness', this building was completed in 1842 by designers and craftsmen with materials brought in from China. Observe the superior craftsmanship of the temple, in particular, the elaborately decorated roof forms and the dragon motif on the roofs and pillars.

The temple started as a joss house on the shore, where early Chinese immigrants disembarked, for the deity Ma Cho Po (Mother of the Heavenly Sages). Immigrants thanked her for bringing them safely across the South China Sea. The Sea Goddess is worshipped by millions of Chinese all over the world for a safe journey before they embark on a voyage.

This temple was gazetted as a National Monument in 1973.

### ▶ 4 Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre

Situated on the corner of this street, this building has been a meeting place and house of worship for Indian Muslims since the 1820s. Look at the interesting architecture of the shrine – it is an unusual blend of classical Western motifs (arches springing from Western-style columns) and Indian influences (the perforated grilles and walls). This shrine was gazetted as a National Monument in 1974.



6. Telok Ayer Green

### ▶ 5 Al-Abrar Mosque

This mosque was built by Indian Muslims from southern India in the mid-1850s. Indian craftsmen were brought in to construct the building.

With an Indian-Islamic theme, the building is fronted by two towers (with two smaller ones in between). A small dome on top of each tower is the only decoration on this simple brick building.

### ▶ 6 Telok Ayer Green

Cut through Telok Ayer Green as you make your way to Ann Siang Hill. Tucked between Telok Ayer Street and Amoy Street, this pocket park serves as a small retreat for office workers during lunchtime and for tourists seeking refuge from Chinatown to rest and relax. This small, green space has symbolic historical significance – the design of the park takes after the contours of the shoreline.

The other prominent attraction of the park is a set of sculptures – a *sampan* (wooden boat) used to ferry goods, an Indian milk trader and a Chinese lantern procession. Information boards next to the sculptures detail the trade and way of life in the early days of Singapore.

## START POINT

### ▶ 1 Telok Ayer Street

This walking trail begins at the start of Telok Ayer Green, along Telok Ayer Street (*telok ayer* means 'water bay' in Malay). The park is flanked by two National Monuments – Thian Hock Keng Temple and Nagore Durgha Shrine. Al-Abrar Mosque is further down the street.

This street once stood at the south of the Singapore River, where the original shoreline was only metres away from the street. It was reclaimed in the 1880s. In the 1820s, it was the landing site for the early immigrants, who, having survived perilous journeys, set up places of worship to give thanks to their gods. Indian Muslims from South India built the Al-Abrar Mosque and the Nagore Durgha Shrine along the street. The Hokkiens set up a shrine that eventually became the Thian Hock Keng Temple.

Immigrants from China gathered in this area as it was designated a Chinese district by Sir Stamford Raffles – founder of modern Singapore – in 1822. It became both a bustling business centre and the location of several Chinese association clans.

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7. Amoy Street



8. First Anglo-Chinese School

#### ► 7 Amoy Street

From Telok Ayer Green, cross Amoy Street and cut through the side lane between shophouse number 90 and 92 to get to Ann Siang Hill Park.

This is also one of the pioneer streets developed under Raffles' 1822 Plan. This street probably obtained its name from the large number of migrants who came from Amoy in China.

During the colonial period when opium contributed greatly to Singapore's trade, this street was filled with opium dens, patronised mostly by coolies who indulged in opium smoking as a form of escape from their harsh lives in Singapore.

#### ► 8 First Anglo-Chinese School

You may wish to make a small detour and stop by shophouse number 70 on Amoy Street, which is the location of the first Anglo-Chinese School in Singapore. This school was founded by Methodist missionaries in 1886.

This shophouse, now called ACS House, has been gazetted as a historic site since the late 1990s.

#### ► 9 Ann Siang Hill Park

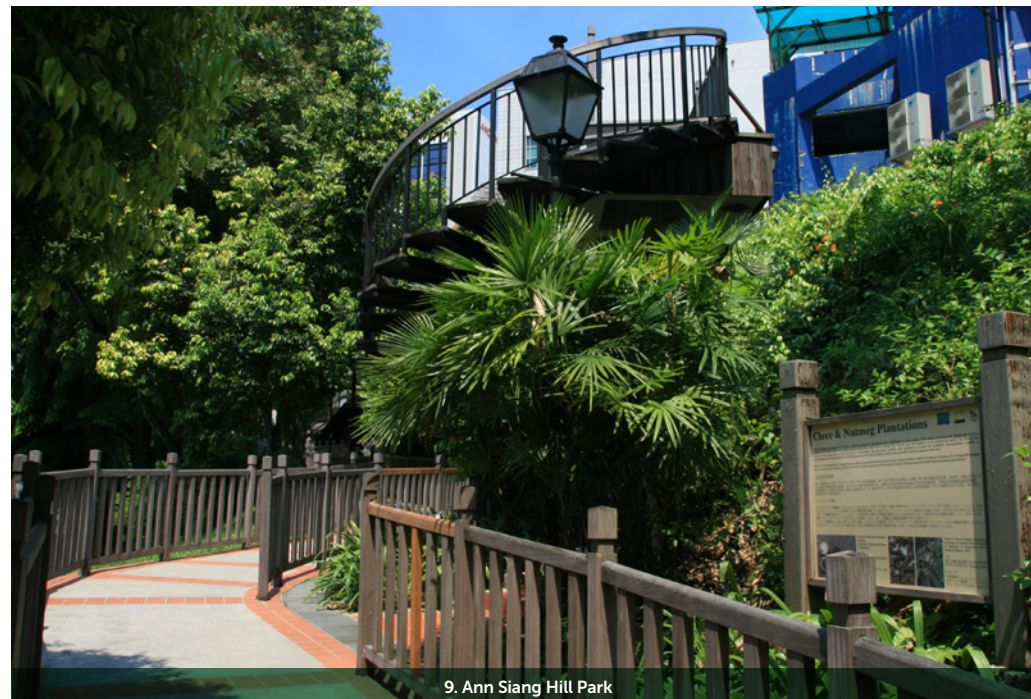
Linger in this area and explore both the old and restored shophouses. Most of them now house an eclectic mix of fashion boutiques, antique furniture shops, art galleries, trendy bars and cafes.

Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine Ann Siang Hill in the old days – finely decorated shophouses housing the pioneer Chinese immigrants, a gathering place abuzz with Chinese clan and association activities, and an intimate part of Chinatown steeped in Chinese customs and traditions that survive till now.

#### ► 10 Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*)

Widely cultivated in several parts of the tropics, this slow-growing tree thrives in full sun. It has an umbrella-shaped crown of light-green foliage.

See if you can spot its fruits – long, brown, thick velvety pods – scattered on the ground. The pods contain sweet-sour pulp known as tamarind or *asam jawa* (commonly used in local cuisine for the tangy flavour it gives to dishes).



9. Ann Siang Hill Park



10. Tamarind



Tamarind Fruit



11. Old Well

#### ► 11 Old Well

In the 1800s, there was limited fresh water supply in Chinatown. Residents had to collect fresh water in bullock-drawn carts (hence Chinatown's local name *Niu Che Shui*, which stands for 'Bullock Cart Water') from several wells situated on Ann Siang Hill.

The well you see here is probably the only one left standing at Ann Siang Hill.





12. Breadfruit



14. Cinnamon

► **12 Breadfruit** (*Artocarpus altilis*)

Large green globes hanging from its branches are the highlight of the Breadfruit Tree. This tree, a member of the fig family, got its name from the texture of its fruit which resembles that of bread. The fruit can be eaten boiled, baked, roasted or ground into flour. Breadfruit fried in batter is also a local snack.

► **13 Nutmeg** (*Myristica fragrans*)

Walk up the spiral staircase that takes you to a timber deck with a trellis covered by a creeper known as Chinese Honeysuckle or Rangoon Creeper (*Quisqualis indica*).

From the deck, see if you can spot the Nutmeg Tree. The original owner of this hill, Charles Scott, cultivated nutmeg and clove plantations in this area.

Nutmeg, a slow-growing tree native to the Banda Islands (a tiny archipelago in eastern Indonesia, also known as the Moluccas or Spice Islands), has a dense conical crown with small, glossy and dark-green leaves. Its fruit, oval in shape and yellowish brown in colour, opens slightly when ripe to reveal bright-red flesh encasing a brown nut. Nutmeg is used in traditional medicine for illnesses related to the nervous and digestive systems. Previously, it was a trade commodity in the 1800s and was of great economic value.

► **14 Cinnamon** (*Cinnamomum verum*)

Look out for the Cinnamon Tree in this park. This is a small evergreen tree with oblong-shaped leaves. When young, the leaves are reddish pink, adding colour and vibrancy to the entire tree. Its flowers are greenish in colour and emit a distinct smell. The spice, cinnamon, is obtained from the bark of the tree.



13. Nutmeg Tree



→ Nutmeg Fruit and Seeds



15. Club Street

► **15 Club Street**

Exit Ann Siang Hill Park and walk along the back of Ann Siang Road to get to Club Street. This street got its name from the various Chinese clubs that lined this street from as far back as 1891, including *Kee Lam Club* (a leading Straits Chinese club for several decades), *Chui Lan Club* (a meeting place for wealthy Chinese businessmen) and *Ee Hoe Club* (the most exclusive and prestigious of Chinese clubs founded by a group of Hokkien businessmen).

*We hope you have enjoyed your walk on this trail.  
For another slice of Singapore's history, embark on  
the Monument Trail in Empress Place Park,  
Esplanade Park and War Memorial Park.*

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