



Writer-in-the-Gardens Residency 2016

Fort Canning Park

Residency Period: 1 July 2016 to 31 December 2016

Just a stone's throw away from one of the busiest shopping areas in Singapore is a cool, shady nature walk around a hill which has a history that goes back 700 years. Relax by taking a stroll through the park situated on the hill or immerse yourself in this tranquil green oasis while commuting from Orchard Road to the Civic District or the Singapore River.

Steeped in history, Fort Canning Hill was once known as “Bukit Larangan” or the “Forbidden Hill”. This is because Malays in the 19th century believed that it was the seat of royalty for rulers of Temasek (or “Sea Town”, an old name for Singapore) in the 1300s. Later, Singapore’s colonial leaders made their residences there, and the hill became a military base during the Second World War. Today, ancient artefacts dating back to the 14th century have been unearthed and the Fort Gate, remnant of the fortress built in the 1860s, is a reminder of Singapore’s colonial past.

Why Fort Canning?

- A park steeped in the richness of Singapore history
- Good diversity of flora and fauna
- Conveniently located in the city centre



The Fort Canning Spice Trail sits on the site of Singapore’s first experimental and botanical gardens, started by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1822. This small replica of the garden now has a collection of more than 50 species of plants – spice, herbs, medicinal, economical and ornamentals. Nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*) and Clove (*Syzygium aromaticum*) trees, which were planted extensively in the first garden, can be found there as well. Other attractions along this trail include the Archaeological Dig, which showcases the actual excavation site, the only such

exhibition in modern Singapore and *Keramat*, believed to be a tomb of Singapore’s last king, Sultan Iskandar Syah.

Majestic trees, some gnarled with age, spread their branches to cast deep pools of shade over the sprawling green spaces. Like guardians of this historic site, the magnificent fig tree (*Ficus microcarpa* and other species), Saga (*Adenantha pavonina*), Silk-cotton Tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) and Madras Thorn (*Pithecellobium dulce*) stand watch. The Bird’s Nest Fern (*Asplenium nidus*) and other epiphytic denizens reside on broad branches of the Rain Tree (*Samanea saman*), protected by its shady crown.

Fort Canning is also good for bird-watching. Visitors can hear the trills of the Black-naped Oriole (*Oriolis chinensis*) over the hum of the cicadas. Collared Kingfishers (*Halcyon chloris*), Olive-backed Sunbirds (*Nectarinia jugularis*) and Yellow-vented Bulbuls (*Pyconotus goiavier*) lend flashes of colour as they flit from tree to tree. The park is also a home and hunting ground to populations of squirrels, bats and lizards.

Today, Fort Canning Park also houses a hotel, Hotel Fort Canning, in a building formerly occupied by the British Army’s Far East Command Centre during the Second World War. There

is also a restaurant, “Lewin Terrace”, at another colonial building, the former Fire Director's residence, located behind the Central Fire Station.

Many events including concerts and performances such as “Ballet Under the Stars” and “Shakespeare in the Park” are held regularly on the lawns at Fort Canning Green and Fort Gate.

Did You Know...

Sir Stamford Raffles, Singapore’s founder, built his house on Fort Canning Hill in 1823 during his third and last visit to Singapore. Today, a building known as “Raffles House” has been constructed near the site of the original residence to mark its location. Raffles House is now an event space where many weddings and other functions take place. From its vantage location, Raffles House also gives visitors a good overview of other historical landmarks such as the dome of the National Gallery Singapore and new landmarks such as the iconic Marina Bay Sands building.



Facilities available:

- Access to research and resources about Fort Canning Park
- Workspace with wireless internet connection
- Variety of spaces available for public sessions
- Guided tours and workshops on Fort Canning’s heritage, spices, trees and sculptures

For more information about the NAC Writer-in-the-Gardens Residency and how to submit an application for the 2016 Residency, visit this webpage: <https://nac.gov.sg/art-forms/literary-arts/initiatives/gardens-residency>