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2



3



4



5

MEMORIES - A MINI LOOK AT SINGAPORE'S HERITAGE

# FIRST-RATE ESTATE

Queenstown scores on many fronts and is a heritage trail well worth exploring

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QUEENSTOWN IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD of firsts. It was the earliest housing estate in Singapore; the first satellite new town to be developed by the former Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) in the 1950s, and later on by the Housing Development Board. It was also named after Queen Elizabeth II, in honour of her coronation.

Spanning over 20 sq km, it's divided into 16 subzones, including Commonwealth, Queensway, Holland Drive, and Tanglin Halt. That makes it a satisfyingly large heritage trail to explore, especially when you've taken the trouble to pack your bicycles in your MINI Countryman, in the large space created by folding down the back seats.

Leave the car outside the colonial terraces at Jalan Hang Jebat. This little stretch of road is one of the southernmost points of the trail, making it a good starting point. The colonial houses you ride past were constructed by the British from the 1930s onwards to house military personnel working nearby. Regular people can now rent them out.

Head north on Queensway and you'll reach the former Baharuddin Vocational Institute, which was Singapore's first school dedicated to manual and applied arts in Singapore. It was opened by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on June 20, 1965 to teach students skills in advertising, fashion, and printing, but now houses Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS).

Queenstown Secondary Technical School (now Queenstown Secondary School) was also the first technical school in Singapore, opened in 1956 as an all-boys school. The former Lee Kong Chian Gardens School - first permanent school for intellectually disabled children - which opened in 1969, is also here. Queenstown also housed one of the first industrial

estates in Singapore – the former Tanglin Halt Industrial Estate, which had 38 factory lots over some eight hectares of land. It was developed in the 1960s to house light and medium industries because it was close to the former Malayan Railways and had a large labour catchment. This was also one of the reasons why the first flatted factory in Singapore was built in Queenstown in the 1960s.

While many flock to see Tiong Bahru's flats, the first HDB flats were built in Queenstown, just months after HDB was formed in 1960. Blocks 45, 48 and 49 were built under a Five-Year Programme to alleviate overcrowding in the city centre, and are still standing today at Stirling Road.

Other firsts in the neighbourhood include the Queenstown Public Library, which officially opened in April 1970 as the first full-time branch library, and the Ridout Tea Garden, which was the first Japanese-themed community garden. The Queenstown Polyclinic, formerly located at Margaret Drive, was also Singapore's first polyclinic which opened in 1963, while the first neighbourhood Sports Complex opened in August 1970.

Even the Queensway Shopping Centre was one of Singapore's first multi-purpose shopping centres alongside Golden Mile and Katong, while the Tanglin Halt Neighbourhood Centre was one of the earliest ones ever built. The latter houses an old sundry shop Thin Huat, run by a friendly 60-year-old shopkeeper who took over his family business which dates back to the 1920s. Like most things in fast-moving Singapore though, it won't be there much longer. The estate is slowly undergoing a redevelopment project, so visit these heritage locations while you can.

(1) Ridout Tea Garden (2) Singapore's first flatted factory (3) The MINI Countryman outside the Queenstown Public Library (4) One of the first HDB flats (5) An old sundry shop at Tanglin Halt Neighbourhood Centre

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