Your Guide To
St John’s Island Trail

Welcome to St John’s Island and the Sisters’ Islands Marine Park!

The Sisters’ Islands Marine Park is Singapore’s first Marine Park. It includes the two Sisters’ Islands as well as the western reefs of St John’s Island and Pulau Tekukor. The Marine Park was established to promote outreach, education, research and conservation of Singapore’s coastal and marine environment.

On St John’s Island (which is managed by the Singapore Land Authority), visitors can learn more about the Marine Park at a Public Gallery in the Marine Park Outreach and Education Centre, a collaboration between the National Parks Board and the Tropical Marine Science Institute, National University of Singapore. The Public Gallery forms part of the St John’s Island Trail, which introduces visitors to the island’s rich history, natural habitats, Heritage Trees and abundant wildlife.

This guide will lead you on an exploration of St John’s Island. On your journey, we hope you will have many enriching encounters with both nature and history, and will return soon to enjoy the sights of Singapore’s first Marine Park.

How to get there

Regular ferry services to St John’s Island are available from Marina South Pier, twice on weekdays and up to five times on weekends and public holidays. To reach Big Sister’s Island, visitors can charter a boat from Marina South Pier or West Coast Pier.

Walking time: 1 – 1.5 hrs
Difficulty level: Easy to moderate
Distance: 2.8 km
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ST JOHN’S ISLAND
TRAIL SITE MARKERS
1. ST JOHN’S ISLAND
2. SINGAPORE’S FORMER ‘QUARANTINE ISLAND’
3. MANGROVES
4. COASTAL FORESTS AND LAZARUS ISLAND
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12. MOLLUSCS
13. CRUSTACEANS
14. FISHES
15. CORAL REEFS

Heritage Tree
Do note that some of these Heritage Trees are not in publicly accessible areas.

Mangrove
To Lazarus Island

Toilet
Power house
Lifeguard tower
Changing room

Marine Park Outreach and Education Centre / St John’s Island National Marine Laboratory
St John’s Island

St John’s Island was known to navigators even before modern Singapore was founded in 1819. Erédia, a Portuguese-Eurasian explorer, marked ‘Pulo Siquijan’ on a map he made in 1604. This was probably a misspelling of the island’s Malay name, Pulau Sekijang, which means ‘Barking Deer Island’. European sailors later corrupted ‘Sekijang’ into ‘Sijang’ and finally, ‘St John’s’.

Singapore’s Former ‘Quarantine Island’
The British established a quarantine centre on St John’s Island in 1874. The quarantine centre, which closed in 1973, housed and treated passengers who arrived on ships with infectious diseases such as cholera, smallpox and plague. In 1948, parts of the island were converted into a detention centre for political prisoners including C. V. Devan Nair, who later became Singapore’s third President.

Between 1955 and 1975, St John’s Island also housed an Opium Treatment Centre. In 1976, the island served as a base for marine research with the establishment of the St John’s Island National Marine Laboratory in 2002 and the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore’s Marine Aquaculture Centre in 2003.

Mangroves
A small patch of mangroves, which are trees that have adapted to life in the sea, has established itself by the seawall at St John’s Island. This patch is dominated by two species: Bakau Pasir, which has prominent prop roots, and Tumu, which has knee roots that protrude above the ground. Both species produce long fruits called propagules, which begin to grow even before they fall off the parent tree. Once prized for their wood which makes excellent charcoal, mangroves today are increasingly valued as nurseries for young fish and as living ‘seawalls’ that protect coasts from storms.

Coastal Forests and Lazarus Island
Next to St John’s Island lies Pulau Sekijang Pelepah, which was renamed Lazarus Island in 1899 when a lazaretto (quarantine hospital) was built on it. Today, the island, which was linked to St John’s Island in the early 2000s, is home to a rich coastal hill forest with plants such as the Delek Air, Common Rhu and Sea Almond.

Birds
St John’s Island is a haven for birdwatchers. The Brahminy Kite regularly soars over the island as it hunts for prey. Birds that stalk fish by the water’s edge include the Striated Heron and Great-billed Heron. Other common birds on the island include the Oriental Magpie Robin (Copsychus saularis), sunbirds, kingfishers, nightjars and even a few Feral Peafowl.
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6  Reptiles And Amphibians
St John’s Island is home to several species of reptiles and amphibians. Snakes found on the island include the arboreal Paradise Tree Snake (Chrysopelea paradisii), Gold-ringed Cat Snake and House Wolf Snake. Sea turtles such as the Hawksbill Turtle can also be found in the waters of the Marine Park, and a turtle hatchery is planned at Small Sister’s Island. Amphibians on the island include the Banded Bullfrog.

7  Insects And Spiders
Insects (which have six legs) and spiders (which have eight legs) form part of the island’s terrestrial invertebrate community. The Golden Orb-web Spider often spins its huge web at the forest edge, which is also a habitat for many species of moths, butterflies, beetles and dragonflies. There is even a Marine Spider that lives on coral reefs and feeds on small marine creatures.

8  Heritage Trees
St John’s Island is home to 10 trees that have been marked by the National Parks Board as Heritage Trees for their exceptional size and botanical, social, historical, cultural and/or aesthetic value. The island’s Heritage Trees include: two Tembusus, four Sea Figs, a Tempinis, a Machang Pulasan, a Penaga Laut (Calophyllum inophyllum) and a Common Pulai (Alstonia angustiloba). Do note that some of these Heritage Trees are not in publicly accessible areas.

9  Marine Research And Conservation In Singapore
The Sisters’ Islands Marine Park is dedicated to research, education and outreach programmes involving Singapore’s marine biodiversity. The Marine Park hosts regular public intertidal walks at Big Sisters’ Island and also serves as a base for research and conservation projects on endangered species such as the Giant Clam (Tridacna gigas), Neptune’s Cup Sponge (Cliona patera) and marine turtles.

10 The Intertidal Zone
The intertidal zone refers to the parts of the seashore that are exposed when the tide is low. During low tides, you can explore the swimming lagoons but do wear covered shoes for safety. Animals and plants that you may encounter include seagrasses, Common Sea Stars, fiddler crabs (Uca spp.), sea cucumbers and hermit crabs.

★ Marine Park Public Gallery
Visit the Public Gallery of the Sisters’ Islands Marine Park Outreach and Education Centre to learn more about marine biodiversity and conservation in Singapore. The Public Gallery is housed within the St John’s Island National Marine Laboratory.

Opening hours:
Weekdays: 10 am to 2.30 pm
Saturdays: 10 am to 3.30 pm
Sundays and Public Holidays: 10 am to 5.30 pm
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13 Rocky shores and Pulau Tekukor
Natural rocky shores and cliffs can be found on the northeastern tip of St John's Island. This habitat is home to rare trees such as the Nyireh Laut and Tongkat Ali as well as marine life such as limpets and reef worms. The western reefs of Pulau Tekukor are part of the Marine Park. This rocky island was once known as Pulau Penyabong (Duelers’ Island), as it was said to be an ancient battlesite.

12 Molluscs
Molluscs, which include snails, limpets, clams and cockles, usually have one shell (gastropods) or two shells (bivalves). The Marine Park is home to the Fluted Giant Clam. This locally Endangered bivalve, which can reach 45 cm long, is being studied and bred for restoration in local reefs. Some molluscs, such as slugs, nudibranchs, octopuses and squids, lack shells.

13 Crustaceans
Crustaceans include crabs, prawns, lobsters and barnacles. These animals are mostly aquatic but some species, such as the Land Hermit Crab, have adapted to life on land. Fiddler crabs (Uca spp.) can be commonly seen feeding at low tide. In 2015, the Blue Land Crab (Discoplax hirtipes), which was last recorded locally in 1938, was rediscovered on St John’s Island.

14 Fishes
Fish from tiny gobies to black-tip reef sharks abound in the waters of St John’s Island and the Marine Park. Some species, as filefishes and the venomous Estuarine Stonefish, are well-camouflaged among rocks and seaweed. Colourful fishes such as butterflyfish, wrasses and anemonefish dwell in the reefs. During low tide, you may see mudskippers foraging on the mud.

15 Coral Reefs
Corals are tiny sea anemone-like animals that produce skeletons of calcium carbonate, which make up the foundation of a coral reef. Coral reefs can be found in the waters around the Sisters’ Islands, Pulau Tekukor and St John’s Island. These habitats, which provide a home and food for thousands of marine species from sea sponges to feather stars and dolphins, have been called the rainforests of the sea. Singapore has more than 250 species of hard corals.

Check out other trails at www.nparks.gov.sg