

# Your Guide to **Colonial History** Trail in Fort Canning Park

Fort Canning Hill is one of Singapore's most historic landmarks. It was believed that the palaces of ancient Malay rulers stood on the summit of this once 'Forbidden Hill'. It was here that Sir Stamford Raffles built his bungalow. The hill also became an important communication centre, housing key communication devices such as the flagstaff, time ball, lighthouse and a telegraph office.

The hill was converted into a fort in 1860 and renamed Fort Canning in honour of Viscount Charles John Canning, Governor-General and first Viceroy of India. In the 1920s and 1930s, the hill was transformed into an artillery fort with barracks, officers' quarters, old gunpowder magazine and a hospital. An underground bunker was also constructed during the period.

As you embark on this trail, soak in the hill's heritage while admiring the colonial structures standing in the park today.



Difficulty level: Moderate



Distance: 2km



Walking time: 45min



2 Nine-pound Cannon and South Battery



9 Raffles House and Raffles Terrace



10 Time Ball



17 Fort Gate



22 Sally Port



24 First Christian Cemetery



24 Gothic Gates in First Christian Cemetery



26 Cupolas



Dhoby Ghaut MRT Exit B

7 14 14e 16 36 65  
77 106 111 124  
128 162 162M  
167 171

Legend

- Tarmac Road
- Track
- Staircase/Steps
- Escalator
- Building
- Carpark
- Old Cemetery Wall
- Toilet
- Restaurant
- Vending Machine
- Pedestrian Underpass
- Shelter
- Heritage Tree
- MRT Station

7 14 14e 16 36  
65 77 106 111  
124 128 162  
162M 167 171

7 14 14e 16 36  
77 106 111 124  
128 131 147 162  
162M 166



1. Fort Canning Centre



2. Nine-pound Cannon

7. Earliest known sketch of Government House, 1823  
(Photo credit: British Library Board)

4. Old Townscape, 1870s



5. Pods of the Ear-pod Tree



6. Bond Terrace

## START POINT

### ► 1 Fort Canning Centre

Fort Canning Centre was originally constructed in 1926 as a British army barracks. In the 1970s, the building was converted into squash courts and offices. The lawn in front of the building, Fort Canning Green, is a popular venue for concerts and music festivals.

### ► 2 Nine-pound Cannon and South Battery

This cannon dates back to the 19th century and had become obsolete even before the fortification at Fort Canning was constructed. Most probably it was used at Scandal Point, an earlier fortification at the east end of Padang. You can see a similar cannon standing 200m ahead, which is the area where the main battery of guns was erected in the 19th century. The guns were mounted on carriages that could be pivoted to enable the guns to cover a wide arc of fire.

### ► 3 Singapore's First Experimental and Botanical Garden

On your left is the site of the first experimental and botanical garden in Singapore, established in 1822 by Sir Stamford Raffles.

At that time, spices were as valuable as gold among the English, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese. There was a fight for control over the sources and routes to the Spice Islands of Southeast Asia and India. In response to this fervour, Raffles planted mainly nutmeg, clove and other plants of economic value at the garden at Fort Canning Hill.

### ► 4 Old Townscape

The above photograph of Singapore was taken from this hill in the 1870s.

Stop for a moment and from where you are standing, imagine yourself back in that era looking at the bustling town below. Visualise a splendid view of horses and carriages going by, bullock carts and rickshaws pulled by weather-beaten pullers – all these set against the panoramic backdrop of vessels docking and folk plying their wares at the harbour.



Ear-pod Tree

### ► 5 Heritage Tree – Ear-pod Tree (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*)

This tree is native to Central America. Its ear-shaped pods contain a dry sugary pulp that is used as fodder feed. The bark and pods of the tree produce a substance called tannin, which can be used to make soap.

Scattered throughout the park are mature Ear-pod Trees like this one. These trees have been given Heritage Tree status under the Heritage Tree Scheme, as part of efforts to promote the conservation of mature trees in Singapore.

### ► 6 Bond Terrace

This terrace was named after Major-General Sir Lionel Vivian Bond (1884-1961). Between 1939 and 1941, he was the General Officer Commanding Malaya. He retired in 1941 and was replaced by Lieutenant-General Arthur Ernest Percival.

### ► 7 Government House and Fort Canning Hill

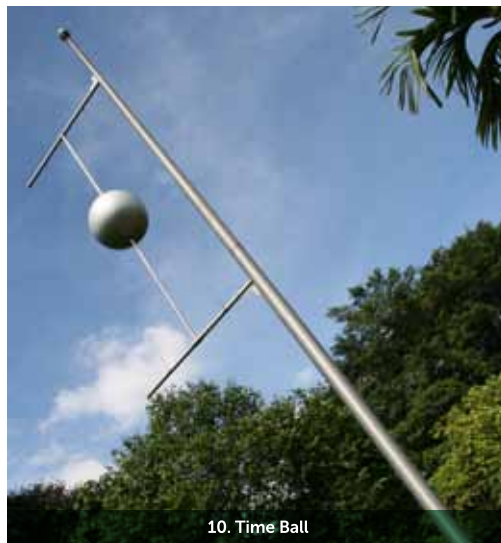
Raffles built the first official government mansion near this spot in 1822. John Crawford, the second British Resident of Singapore, and subsequent residents later enlarged the house. When Fort Canning was built in 1860, this hill's ownership was transferred from a civil to a military one. The mansion's front yard became the South Battery, which overlooked the town and harbour. The drawing above shows the earliest sketch of the Government House on top of the hill at Fort Canning.



9. Raffles Terrace (Photo credit: Choo Meng Foo)



9. Raffles House



10. Time Ball



11. Flame of the Forest



12. Lighthouse



13. Leaves of the Broad-leafed Fig



14. Flagstaff

### ▶ 8 Signing of the Treaty in 1824

In 1824, the British resolved their territorial disputes with the Dutch. They also convinced the sultan of Singapore to cede the rest of the island, along with the southern coast where they had established a thriving trading post, to them. A treaty was signed in that year to seal this agreement.

The signing of this treaty, like other very important public ceremonies then, was probably carried out in the governor's residence on Fort Canning Hill.

### ▶ 9 Raffles House and Raffles Terrace

The building you see here is Raffles House, named after Raffles' bungalow. He built his bungalow on top of Fort Canning Hill for the beautiful view it commanded. His bungalow was also the place of residence for a long line of governors. This site offers an excellent vantage point to pick out the Old Supreme Court dome and other well-known landmarks in the civic district.

Fort Canning Hill became an important communication centre after the British established a port here in 1819. The first communication facility built on the hill was a flagstaff. This was followed in the 19th century by a time ball, a lighthouse and a telegraph office.

Learn more about the uses of these communication facilities by visiting the replicas at Raffles Terrace.

### ▶ 10 Time Ball

You are looking at a replica of the original time ball that was erected on this site. Time balls were used in the past to signal the correct time to the public.

Historically, the time ball on Fort Canning Hill was raised at 12:55pm and dropped at exactly 1pm daily, according to standard British practice. This helped businesses, government offices, and residents in the downtown area set their clocks and other time-keeping devices to a common time.

### ▶ 11 Heritage Tree – Flame of the Forest (*Delonix regia*)

This is another Heritage Tree that you can see in Fort Canning Park. It has a spreading canopy with fine leaves. The beautiful scarlet flowers, when in bloom, may cover the entire crown and can last for weeks. The trunk of a mature tree like this is gnarled near the base. Its fruits, which are long pods, appear like swords hanging from the branches.

### ▶ 12 Lighthouse

The lighthouse you see here is a small replica of the original that used to stand on Fort Canning Hill. The lighthouse on Fort Canning Hill was one of Singapore's most prominent landmarks for ships entering the harbour. The total elevation of 60m (made possible by the combined height of the hill and lighthouse) made the lighthouse visible up to 30km away.

In the 1950s, the lighthouse was overshadowed by tall buildings and was eventually closed.

### ▶ 13 Broad-leafed Fig, Elephant Ear Fig Tree (*Ficus auriculata*)

This tree, which is native to India, South China and Indochina, has rounded leaves, with young shoots of intense mahogany colour. Its pear-shaped fruits turn reddish brown when ripe and are often used to make jams.

Figs have an interesting co-dependence with fig wasps. The flowers are pollinated by fig wasps; the latter squeeze their way into the fruits to lay eggs. The fruits in turn provide food for the larvae of the wasps.

### ▶ 14 Flagstaff

This flagstaff is a replica of the original that used to stand on Fort Canning Hill.

The flagstaff provided pertinent information on the arrival, identity, location, and status of ships entering Singapore's harbour.

The first flagstaff on Fort Canning Hill was already standing in 1825. In addition to this flagstaff, another stood on Mount Faber.

The original wooden flagstaff on this hill was later replaced by a steel structure, which was removed by the Japanese in about 1943 for unknown reasons during their occupation of Singapore.

The British erected another flagstaff on the hill after World War II, but it was only used for flying the British flag. This last flagstaff was removed when a signal transmission tower was built.



15. Madras Thorn



17. Fort Gate



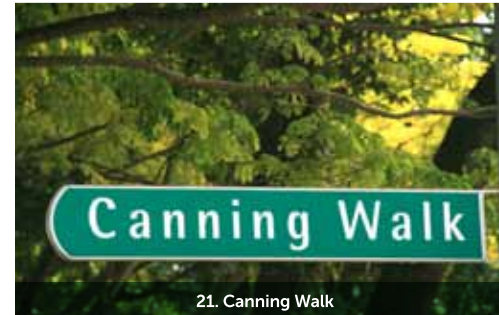
16. Fort Canning Service Reservoir



18. Fort Wall



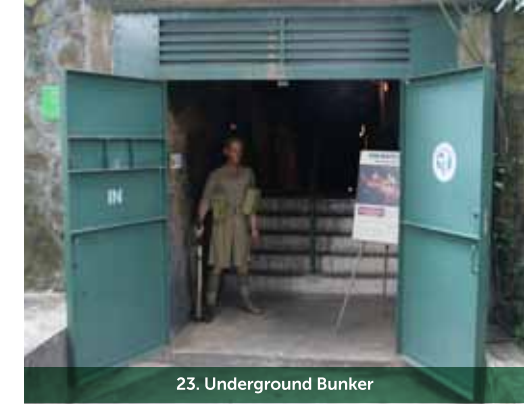
20. Hotel Fort Canning



21. Canning Walk



22. Sally Port



23. Underground Bunker

### ▶ 15 Tree Appreciation

As you stroll down this path that meanders along the perimeter of the northern part of the reservoir, take a few moments to observe the flora and fauna here. You can find trees like the 'hairy' Malayan Banyan (*Ficus microcarpa*), 'thorny' Kapok (*Ceiba pentandra*) and tall Terap (*Artocarpus elasticus*) in this area.

Look out for the Madras Thorn (*Pithecellobium dulce*), another Heritage Tree in this park. This tree, which is native to Central America, has a bushy crown with twigs bearing small prickly thorns. Its seeds, which are rose red in colour, are covered with a thick white pulp. Birds feed on the pulp and help to disperse the seeds.

### ▶ 16 Fort Canning Service Reservoir

This service reservoir was constructed in 1926 on the former site of a large artillery barrack and parade ground to supplement water supply in the vicinity.

Before this reservoir was built, a spring gushing from the southwest side of this hill had served as an important source of water for centuries.

### ▶ 17 Fort Gate

You are now passing through a remnant of the fortress that once occupied Fort Canning Hill from 1861 to 1926. The fort served two purposes – to protect Singapore from a sea-borne attack, and to give Singapore's European population a refuge in the event of local disturbances.

### ▶ 18 Remnants of Fort Wall

The fort wall that you now see is a fragment of the strong wall that once surrounded the summit of this hill. The low, thick wall was meant to withstand artillery bombardment. A moat, which has completely disappeared, used to run around this wall.

### ▶ 19 Old Gunpowder Magazine

An old gunpowder magazine, 30m long and 10m wide, used to lie beneath the ground near this spot. It was subsequently converted into a shooting range for target practice.

### ▶ 20 Hotel Fort Canning

Built by the British in the 1920s, this building was the headquarters for the Far East Command and the office of Lieutenant-General Percival.

This building has been beautifully restored and now stands as Hotel Fort Canning, a boutique hotel.

### ▶ 21 Canning Walk

A short distance away is Canning Walk. It is interesting to know that Fort Canning was named after Viscount Charles John Canning who served as the last Governor-General of India under the old East India Company. He also became the first Viceroy under the new colonial system.

### ▶ 22 Sally Port

The Sally Port (a small door leading in and out of the fort) you see here was one of three at Fort Canning Park. The other two were supposed to be located on the south side near Hill Street. These two have, however, disappeared.

### ▶ 23 Underground Bunker

Visit the underground bunker to get an insight into how an underground command centre functioned. The bunker, constructed in 1936, was to be used as a nerve centre in the event of war for British military operations in Southeast Asia. Situated 9m beneath Fort Canning Hill, it was the site where Lieutenant-General Percival, General Officer Commanding, Malaya Command, made the fateful decision to surrender Singapore to the Japanese on 15 February 1942.



24. First Christian Cemetery

► **24 First Christian Cemetery**

You are now at the site of Singapore's first Christian cemetery. This burial ground was used from 1822 to 1865.

George Drumgold Coleman, an influential figure in the development of Singapore's infrastructure, was the person who oversaw the works at this cemetery.

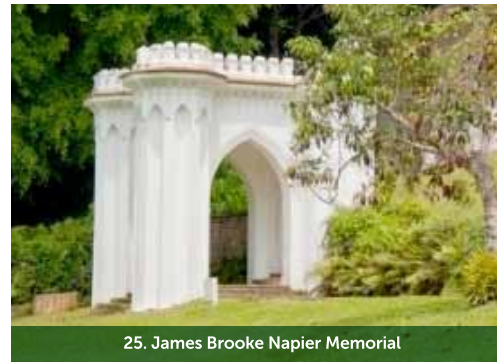
An architect by profession, Coleman was Singapore's first architect and Raffles' consultant on the first Town Plan. He also assumed the role of Superintendent of Public Works in 1833. Coleman also designed several buildings including the nearby Armenian Church and a private house which (after modification) stands today as The Arts House at the Old Parliament. He died in Singapore

in 1844 and was buried at Fort Canning Hill.

Most of the gravestones had become very worn out by the 1970s and were removed. You can still see some headstones along the boundary walls (including Coleman's), as well as old tombstones that were moved here from another cemetery.

Here, you can also find the headstone belonging to the late Dr Jose D'Almeida, another influential figure in Singapore's trading history. When he died in 1850, his mercantile firm Jose D'Almeida & Sons was the biggest and most important in Singapore.

The two Gothic gates to the cemetery were designed by Superintending Engineer Captain Charles Edward Faber, whom Mount Faber was named after.



25. James Brooke Napier Memorial



26. Cupolas



27. Nutmeg in Spice Garden

► **25 James Brooke Napier Memorial**

This Gothic structure was built in memory of the infant son of William and Maria Frances Napier, the widow of Coleman.

The memorial, the largest erected in Government Hill cemetery, reflects the status of the boy's father, who became Singapore's first Law Agent in 1833.



28. Stamford Green

► **26 Cupolas**

These two dome-shaped cupolas, designed by Coleman himself, were probably meant to serve as shelters for rest and contemplation on the hill.

► **27 Spice Garden**

Make a small detour to visit the Spice Garden, a small replica of Singapore's first experimental and botanical garden.

Do look out for interesting herbs and spices as you tour the Spice Garden.

► **28 Stamford Green – 19th-century Gateway to Fort Canning Park**

You are now standing at the Eastern Gateway to Fort Canning Park. This is the last destination for this walking trail.

As you walk around Stamford Green, follow the sequence of information boards that offer interesting information about landmarks in this area. Also, read more about the Old Malay Wall of *Singapura* that used to be near this site.

*We hope you have enjoyed your walk on this trail.*

*If you wish to get up close and personal with spices, embark on the Spice Garden Trail at Fort Canning Park.*

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