

MEDIA FACTSHEET A

About Pulau Ubin

Pulau Ubin lies on the Straits of Johor off the North-eastern coast of mainland Singapore, separated by Serangoon Harbour. The island is 1,020 hectares, stretching 7 km from east to west and 2 km from north to south. The highest point of Pulau Ubin is at Bukit Puaka (75 m).

Previously, Pulau Ubin was known as Granite Island (“*Chieo Suar*” 石山), as granite from the island was used to make floor tiles or *jubin* in Malay. The island’s name derived from a shortened or corrupted form of *jubin* to Ubin.

Pulau Ubin is also known locally as Ban-Gang (半港). Other colloquial site names on the island include the Ubin Village centre, *Kangkar* (港脚, Kg China), *Xingang* (新港), where *Wei Tuo Fa Gong Temple* stands, *Doa Diao Gang* (大条港), *Ji Diao Gang* (二条港), *Ong Lay Sua* (黄梨山 Bukit Nanas) and *Kopi Sua* (咖啡山).

During the 16th-17th century, Pulau Ubin came under the influence of the Johor-Riau Empire and the earliest inhabitants were the Orang Laut and indigenous Malay with Bugis and Javanese origins. During the mid-1840s, Chinese began settling in Pulau Ubin and started to quarry granite. In the 1850s, Government quarries were established and convicts were deployed to quarry granite for the construction of Horsburgh Lighthouse on Pedra Branca (1851), Raffles Lighthouse (1855), the Causeway (1923), Pearl’s Hill Reservoir (1903), Fort Canning (1858), Fort Canning Reservoir (1926), Fort Fullerton Expansion and Singapore Harbour (1913).

Besides the Government quarries, it was reported that there were 10 other quarries operated by 9 different companies in the 1930s. However by the 1950s, five quarries had been abandoned, and granite mining activities ceased in the 1960s. Between the 1950s and early 1970s, there were about 2,000 people living on the island. As granite quarries started to close down in the 1970s, the number began to decrease. There were about 1,000 residents recorded in 1987, 400 in the mid-1990s, 139 in 2001 and only about 30-odd residents left today.

Some of the activities that visitors can enjoy on the island today include cycling, hiking, camping and nature appreciation. NParks has put in place basic amenities like campsites, look out points, tracks, shelters and toilets, to support the recreational options on the island.

Conservation Efforts in Pulau Ubin

A large part of Pulau Ubin has been designated as Nature Area under the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) Special and Detailed Controls Plan, with over 720

native plant species found here, including at least eight not found elsewhere in Singapore. A total of 30 native species of mammals, 219 species of birds, 40 species of reptiles, 7 species of amphibians, 177 species of butterflies and 54 species of dragonflies and damselflies have been recorded for Pulau Ubin. Rare wildlife such as the Greater Mousedeer, Leopard Cat, Small-clawed Otter, Ashy Roundleaf Bat, Malayan False Vampire, Olive Tree Skink, Brown Wood-Owl, Barred Eagle-Owl and Great-billed Heron have been spotted here.

Pulau Ubin's value for biodiversity conservation is highlighted by the recognition of a new plant species, named *Utania nervosa*. The *Utania nervosa* was discovered at Chek Jawa in 1997, and was previously called "*Fagraea racemosa*", having been confused with a much more common tree species that is native from Indo-China (Cambodia, South Vietnam) to Thailand, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. This new species was published in the international journal *Plant Ecology and Evolution* in July 2014, in effect becoming Singapore's newest species! *Utania nervosa* is known only from a very restricted area including southeast Johor and the Singapore islands of Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong. Its known habitats in Johor are marginal sites in degraded swampland.

As the scientific authority on nature conservation and agency tasked with managing the Pulau Ubin Recreation Area and Chek Jawa, the National Parks Board (NParks) has undertaken numerous initiatives to conserve Pulau Ubin's rich biodiversity over the years. Many of these initiatives involve years of committed field research, surveys and habitat restoration efforts together with volunteers, students and the community. Ongoing field research and monitoring studies, including plant surveys, seagrass monitoring, bird ringing, camera trapping, and species counts of birds, butterflies and fireflies, are also carried out by NParks and its volunteers.

In addition, two derelict sites formerly used for granite quarrying have been sensitively rehabilitated to provide habitats for wildlife and recreational opportunities for the visitors.

Documentation efforts of Pulau Ubin

Given Ubin's rich history, the National Heritage Board (NHB) has embarked on various initiatives to research, document and commemorate the heritage of the island. In 2013, NHB commissioned a documentation effort of Pulau Ubin's past. The island's historical sites like the former quarries, temples and shrines were documented along with oral histories of some of the island's residents.

NHB has also commissioned a documentary video featuring the boatmen of Pulau Ubin, part of NHB's "Heritage in Episodes" series of short documentaries. The documentary video clip is currently hosted on NHB's youtube channel at: <http://www.nhb.gov.sg/NHBPortal/Resources/Videos/Overview>

NHB leveraged on Google Streetview technology to create a virtual tour of Pulau Ubin's main town area to give visitors a preview of the island, encouraging to make a visit to the island. The virtual tour is hosted on Google Street View and NHB's website at:

<http://www.nhb.gov.sg/NHBPortal/Resources/VirtualExhibitions&Tours/WalkingThroughHeritage/PulauUbin>

Following the research and documentation efforts, NHB worked with SingPost to feature Pulau Ubin's rustic charm and precious heritage on a series of commemorative stamps. The series was called "Islands of Singapore – Pulau Ubin" and it was launched in July 2014. The series was made up of four stamps featuring the main jetty, Chek Jawa, the wayang stage and a quarry, all iconic landmarks on the island.

NHB has recently acquired two collections of old photographs that feature sights captured on photographic film. These photographs, along with other photographs that document Singapore's past were donated by two members of the public. Please see [Annex A](#) for samples of rare archival photos featuring some of the quarrying activities on the island.

About The Ubin Project

The Ubin Project seeks ideas from members of the public on how the island's rustic charm, natural environment, biodiversity and heritage can continue to be enjoyed by Singaporeans for generations to come.

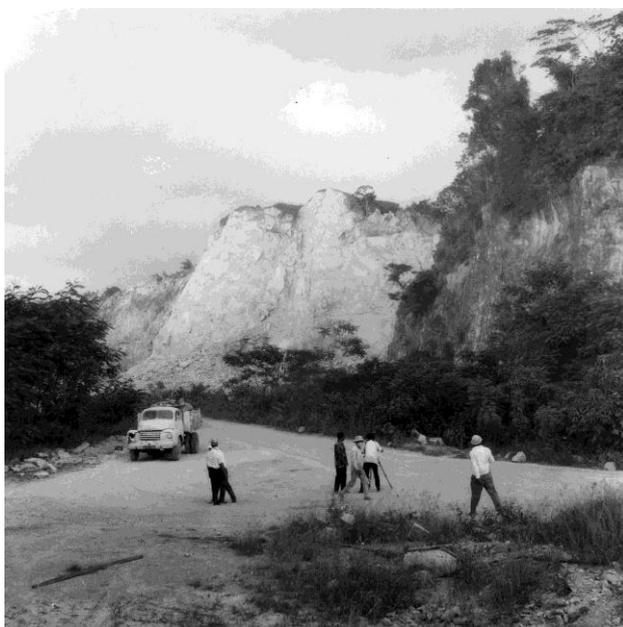
The Friends of Ubin Network (FUN) was formed earlier this year, and comprises youths, residents, volunteers, researchers and members from the heritage and nature communities. Some of them have even banded together to develop a code of conduct for environmentally and socially responsible behaviour on Pulau Ubin. Some of the FUN members call this the "Ubin Way", inspired by the kampong spirit that Pulau Ubin residents already embody today and centred on the innate motivation to care for the environment. Everyone can play a part in their own way.

More than 2,000 ideas have been received as at November 2014. These ideas are varied, ranging from conservation of biodiversity and heritage, to support for education and opportunities for nature-based recreation and trials of sustainable technologies.

Annex A: Archival Photos of Ubin Quarries



Granite Stones being loaded at a jetty
(Photo courtesy of Mr Mun Chor Seng)



Granite Quarry
(Photo courtesy of Mr Mun Chor Seng)



Crushing of granite stones
(Photo courtesy of Mr Mun Chor Seng)

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