



Another Side of Town

Our News Editor describes moving from the bustling city to the quiet Heartlands

By Roxanne Asunción

My family and I first arrived in Singapore in February 1998, on what happened to be Chinese New Year. Going through immigration in Changi Airport was a breeze and then it took only 30 minutes to reach our hotel in the city. The roads were empty and we were apprehensive – what had happened to all the people?

Chinese New Year was our baptism into local life and traditions. The following year we were semi-localised and did what *ang mohs* do at Chinese New Year – sat in traffic for hours to cross the border into Malaysia to enjoy the long holiday while Singapore was ‘on hold’.

We lived near Orchard Road and were mesmerised by what the city had to offer new residents like us. Clean-and-green spaces. Unsurpassed safety in the streets. The Great Singapore Sale, the Chingay Parade, private hospitals, hotels and boutiques at our doorstep. We were where the action was! We could not imagine living anywhere other than central Singapore.

Twelve years later all that changed when we decided that our fourth move was going to be our last. Considering our requirements, we concluded that ‘suburbia’ would be the best place to settle.

We now live in Potong Pasir in the central ‘Heartlands’ of the island. In the early 20th century, this was an area of sand quarries – hence the name Potong Pasir, which means ‘cut sand’ in Malay. The neighbourhood has always remained simple. Across the street from my condominium are original shophouses, hawker stalls and ‘Mom and Pop’ convenience stores much like those I saw in Malaysia on my first trip there in 1999. That sight brought back memories of our first years here and has renewed my zest for adventure.

Also across the street is a patch of green grass and trees that is my new answer to the Botanic Gardens (albeit on a much smaller scale). I am thrilled that here I can still walk in

the company of either the early morning joggers or the after-work exercise buffs as I once did in the Botanic Gardens.

Just a few months ago, if you’d asked me where to shop for bargains, my answer would have been ‘Mustafa Shopping Centre.’ Depending on what I need, now I can find bargains in nearby warehouse sales in Ubi, Hougang or Sin Ming. I am happy shopping in NTUC but I must remember to carry my NETS card as credit cards are limited to the house card. I love how almost everything one needs is in an HDB block – food market, poly-clinic, hairdresser... did I just see McDonald’s?

And what about entertainment? With the efficiency of Singapore’s public transport, I can go anywhere. There are always cabs on call and buses that take me to Orchard Road. Our train line has direct stops in Chinatown, Harbourfront and yes, Clarke Quay. Serendipity!

If I were to describe my neighbourhoods in Singapore as clocks, my city residence would be a metal stopwatch that tick-tocked on, orchestrating the quick pace of the rat race in the Central Business District, ever mindful that every second counts and that time is a-wastin’.

But my new neighbourhood in suburbia would be a charming antique hourglass that measures time with the rhythmic flow of the sands, guaranteeing the silent observer a sense of peace at the end of the day.

Am I now localised? If favouring *kway teow* over pasta and fresh fruit over pastries is proof, I can safely say that I am. Can I settle and grow roots in this piece of sand? *Can, lah!*

Roxanne R Asunción is News Editor of *PASSAGE*. She enjoys viewing art, learning about history and culture and exploring her new neighbourhood.

❶ Photo by the author

❷ Photo by Kathy Chan