



# The Malay Heritage Centre Re-Opens its Doors to Visitors

By Norsaleen Salleh

*The Malay Heritage Centre*

Nestled within the historical precinct of Kampong Gelam is the former *Istana Kampong Gelam*, now known as the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC). First opened in 2005, this heritage institution underwent redevelopment works to refresh its permanent galleries and upgrade its facilities beginning in May 2011. It was re-opened by Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, on 1 September 2012.

As a result of its recent redevelopment works, the museum has been given a new lease of life with revamped permanent galleries showcasing the story of Kampong Gelam as a port town. The revamped galleries also highlight the significance of the precinct to the Malay community, its importance to Singapore as well as its connection to the *Nusantara* (Malay World).

In addition to its revamped permanent galleries, the newly refurbished centre features two temporary galleries, a visitor services counter and an upgraded auditorium. The once forbidding perimeter walls along Kandahar Street have also been lowered and perforated to provide visitors with a clear and inviting view of the manicured estate and its herb and spice garden.

## Re-Living History

It is worth noting that the MHC is located within



*Common housewares found in a Malay household*



*Artefacts from the Zubir Said Collection*

historical Kampong Gelam which, during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, functioned as a natural enclave for communities of aristocrats, intellectuals and traders owing to the presence of the Sultan of Singapore's residence, the mosque and the port.

Trades and industries such as printing and publishing, *Intan* (diamond) and Haj brokerages, shops selling herbs and spices, textiles and houseware, flourished during the same period and catered to the demands of both the local population and the *Nusantara*.

In addition to its role as a hub for the above trades and/or industries, Kampong Gelam was also regarded as the creative and intellectual base of the Malay community which inspired and attracted multifaceted personalities including Harun Aminurrashid, A Samad Said and Ishak Haji Muhammad.

## Showcasing Artefacts

Within the new permanent galleries, artefacts from the National Collection as well as loans and donations from the community are on display, with 86% being shown for the first time.

Some of the key artefacts include a grand piano, original scores and the self-authored music teaching tools from the late Encik Zubir Said, a prolific Malay composer who



One of the performances from Neighbourhood Sketches, MHC's popular monthly programme

composed *Majulah Singapura*, Singapore's national anthem. There are also archaeological finds such as a WWII Mark III rifle and several coins issued by the Straits Settlements, Dutch East Indies as well as Chinese-stamped coins.

Other key artefacts include publications such as the *Utusan Melayu 10 Tahun*, a commemorative edition from the 1930s of Singapore's first Malay newspaper, which featured an article by Singapore's first President, Encik Yusof Ishak; and *Hiboran 10 Tahun*, another commemorative publication published by Royal Press.

In addition to displaying artefacts, the permanent galleries also feature interactive multimedia exhibits by Temasek Polytechnic. These recreate the architectural styles and residences of the Malay communities in and around the Kampong Gelam precinct during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Living Culture

Since its re-opening, the new MHC has introduced a rich and interesting selection of programmes that celebrate Malay culture and heritage. These programmes include *Galleries Alive!* which seeks to enhance visitors' experience by incorporating live, traditional music performances within the centre's Muzik Gallery, while workshops featuring traditional Malay games aim to educate as well as entertain visitors by showing how such games are played.

In September 2013, the MHC will be organising its inaugural Malay Cultural Festival to foster a greater appreciation of Malay arts and culture. The MHC will also be



A Galleries Alive! performance in the Muzik Gallery

partnering with grassroots organisations to organise its first Hari Raya celebrations.

The MHC has introduced additional programmes to complement those conducted within the permanent galleries and the centre's compound so as to inject vibrancy into the Kampong Gelam precinct. One of its most popular off-site programmes is *Neighbourhood Sketches*, which comprises a series of short performances that highlight the different Malay cultural and art forms and is performed along Bussorah Mall.

Owing to a positive public response, the MHC's *Neighbourhood Sketches* are now held every last Friday and Saturday of the month from January to August and feature performances ranging from the traditional Javanese *Kuda Kepang* dance to the popular *Dikir Barat* choral performances of northern Malaysia and to more contemporary *ah-go-go* dances popular in the 1950s and 1960s.



An overview of the historical development of Kampong Gelam in the Anjung Gallery

To find out more about MHC's upcoming programmes, please check our website at [www.malayheritage.sg](http://www.malayheritage.sg) or visit our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/malayheritage](http://www.facebook.com/malayheritage)

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