17th Century Walk

Fort Canning Park is the most historic part of Singapore. Malay and Chinese historical records point to this hill as the center of a kingdom that arose around 1300 AD. The royal palace of ancient Malay rulers probably stood on the summit of this once ‘Forbidden Hill’. Begin your 14th century walk near the Keramat Iskandar Syah. Take a leisurely stroll back in time, to the era of the five kings and the golden age of 14th century Singapore.

Fort Canning Park
Explore Cultural & Historical Heritage in Nature

1) The Keramat Iskandar Syah
Meaning a sacred place in Malay, a Keramat is the traditional burial ground of a revered leader. It is uncertain who was buried here, though some people believe this to be the resting-place of Iskandar Syah, a ruler of Temasek. A 14th century-styled Malay roof called a pendopo, supported by twenty wooden pillars carved in a fighting cock motif of Javanese origin, shelters this structure.

2) Archaeological Excavation Site
Archaeological research at Fort Canning Park began in 1984. Thousands of artifacts have since been uncovered confirming the historical significance of Fort Canning even before the arrival of the British in 1819. Most likely an area used by palace craftsmen manufacturing items of glass and gold in the past, the Archaeological Dig showcases an actual archaeological excavation site, the only such exhibition in modern Singapore.
3) The Parit Singapura

Ancient Malay and Chinese sources mentioned that Singapore had a moat and wall. It ran along the edge of a stream called ‘Fresh Water Stream’, which was probably the Parit Singapura (Moat of Singapore). This has now completely disappeared. Part of the moat run up to the side of Fort Canning Hill, but whether this trench here is related to the ancient moat is not certain.

4) The Singapore River

The western part of Fort Canning Hill offers some relaxing views of the Singapore River, the trading hub of old Singapore. At the mouth of the river once stood the Singapore Stone (a fragment of which is now displayed at the National Museum of Singapore). The Singapore Stone is linked to the story of the legendary 14th century strongman, Badong. He is said to have thrown a massive stone from the audience hall of the king at Fort Canning Hill to the mouth of the Singapore River.

5) Reservoir

This was the site of a natural spring which fed the Pancur Laren, a bathing place reserved for 14th-century Malay royalty and an important source of drinking water for passing ships. During construction of the reservoir in 1926, 14th century gold jewellery of Majapahit style was unearthed and is now stored at the National Museum of Singapore.
7th Century Walk & Other Attractions

The 7th Century Walk links Fort Canning Park's key historic features which recaptures Singapore's first century. Begin your walk at Dobbie Rise, near the roundabout and information kiosk, about 100 m from Fort Canning Centre.

6th Fort Canning Centre & Green

Originally constructed in 1926 as a British army barracks, this building was used briefly by the Singapore Armed Forces before being converted into squash courts and offices in 1970s. Today, the Centre has been restored to house the NParks Visitor Centre, various function rooms and theatre facilities. The Centre is also home to two renowned local establishments, a modern performing arts company Singapore Dance Theatre, and professional culinary academy at-sunrice. The lawn in front of the building, Fort Canning Green is a popular venue for concerts and music festivals.

8th The Legends Fort Canning Park

Built by the British in the 1920s, this grand edifice was headquarters for the Far East command and the office of Lt.-General Percival. In 1966 the Singapore Armed Forces converted the building into its premier training institution, known as the Singapore Command and Staff College.

Today, it has been beautifully restored and renovated into a town club, The Legends Fort Canning Park. The Club houses a cafe and a number of restaurants which are open to the general public.
9) The Battle Box
Construction of this Underground War East Command Centre began in 1936. It was to be used in the event of war as the nerve centre for British Military operations in South East Asia. The Centre was a maze-like complex of 26 rooms and corridors 9 metres underground. It was here during the Second World War, on the morning of 15 February 1942 that Lt.-General Percival, General Officer Commanding, Malaya Command, made the crucial decision to surrender to the Japanese.

11) Cupolas
A prominent architect of early Singapore, George Coleman (1795-1844), designed the Cupolas. No record of their date of construction or their purpose exists; they were possibly meant to be places of repose, where people might come to enjoy the peace and tranquility of the hill.

12) Spice Garden
The Spice Garden is a small replica of the original 19 ha tract Raffles established in 1822 on Government Hill as the first botanical and experimental garden in Singapore. The garden at Fort Canning was planted mainly with nutmeg, clove and other economic plants. These early introductions formed the foundation of Singapore's spice plantations which dominated the island landscape for the next 35 years.

13) No. 21 Lower Terrace
(Dept of the Fort)
This quaint and charming old colonial black & white house was built in 1908.

Once serving as the former residence of the old Fire Chiefs, the bungalow has been charmingly restored to house a restaurant, Flutes at the Fort, offering modern Australian vineyard-inspired dining experience in a relaxed, congenial setting.

14) Raffles Terrace
Sir Stamford Raffles chose to build his bungalow here in 1823 during his third and last visit to Singapore for the beautiful view it commanded, and the site served as residence for a long line of Governors. From this vantage point, visitors will be able to see the well known landmarks in the civic district, e.g. the dome of the Supreme Court.

Raffles Terrace also houses replicas of three significant icons related to its past, namely the Lighthouse, Flagstaff and the Time Ball.
History of Fort Canning Park

Archaeological excavations prove the vitality of Fort Canning hill’s history as far back as the 14th century when it was the seat of the Malay Kingdom, Temasek. According to the Malay Annals, the site was chosen for settlement by Sri Tri Buana, ruler of Temasek and the one reputed to have seen the fabulous lion for which he named the island ‘Singapura’ (Lion City). Beleaguered by attacks from the Siamese and Majapahit, the last known ruler of Temasek, Iskandar Syah, fled from the settlement. Except for minimal portside activity, little was known of the island until the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819.

The Malay locals who received Raffles pointed him to the hill they called Bukit Larangan, which means in Malay ‘Forbidden Hill’. They were fearful of climbing the hill as they thought the palace of their ancestor kings had once stood there. Raffles had part of the hill cleared of jungle, revealing the ruins of ancient brick buildings, which gave support to the legends.

Because of the beautiful view the hill commanded, Raffles chose to build his bungalow and to establish the first botanical garden here in 1822. Until mid-19th century, Singapore’s governors were residents here; thus the epithet ‘Government Hill’.

Around 1860, the colonial government turned the hill into a fort bearing the name of Viscount Charles John Canning, Governor-General and the first Viceroy of India. From that time until the 1970s, Fort Canning was used as a military base – first by the British, then by the Japanese during the Second World War, and lastly by the Republic’s armed forces.

Once the forbidden hill of ancient Malay royalty and later the Far East Command Centre of the British, today’s Fort Canning Park beckons visitors to a tranquil, green oasis. Capitalizing on the rich historical assets of the old citadel, the NATIONAL PARKS BOARD has revitalized Fort Canning into a unique city park with many popular art performances, events and concerts to keep the populace of Singapore.
Fort Canning Park has become a green refuge from the city’s hustle and bustle, a verdant oasis set in the heart of the Civic and Cultural District. Within easy reach of the city-dweller, the park provides a haven for those seeking communion with nature.

Majestic trees, some gnarled with age, spread their branches to cast deep pools of shade over sprawling green spaces. Like guardians of this one-time citadel, the magnificent fig tree (Ficus variegata and other species), Saga (Adenanthera pavonina), Silk-cotton Tree (Ceiba pentandra) and Yellow Flame (Peltophorum pterocarpum) stand watch. The Bird’s Nest Fern (Asplenium nidus) and other epiphytic denizens reside on the broad branches of the Rain Tree (Samanea saman), protected by its shady crown.

Lulling birdsong greets the visitor upon entering the vicinity. The trills of the Black-naped Oriole (Oriolus chinensis) may be heard over the hum of cicadas. Collared Kingfishers (Halcyon chloris), Coppersmith Barbets (Megalaima haemacephala) and Yellow-vented Bulbuls (Pycnonotus goiavier) lend flashes of colour as they flit from tree to tree. The park is not only a gathering place for birds but also a home and hunting ground to populations of squirrels, bats and lizards. For those who try to enjoy the peace and tranquility of the park, there is a lot to discover and much to behold.