



[Media Release] From the sea, to the Singapore River, and now at the National Museum of Singapore – Tracing Singapore’s journey from a bustling port to a global powerhouse

Description

In celebration of the 60th anniversary of Singapore’s independence, the National Museum of Singapore (NMS) is inviting visitors to embark on a voyage of discovery through the ebbs and flows of our nation’s transformation over the years with two new commemorative showcases opening on 24 May. Visitors can look forward to the special exhibition, ***Once Upon a Tide: Singapore’s Journey from Settlement to Global City***, and the family-favourite Children’s Season making its return with ***Get Curious! Building Our Singapore***.

Tracing the tides of Singapore’s transformation: A thematic journey through over 700 years of history

Running until 9 October 2026, ***Once Upon a Tide: Singapore’s Journey from Settlement to Global City*** anchors on Singapore’s maritime connections, inviting visitors to discover how the sea and river have shaped our evolution from a bustling 14th-century port to a global powerhouse of today. Featuring over 350 artefacts from the National Collection, the exhibition traces the constant flows of people, goods and ideas from around the world that have collectively woven the rich and diverse fabric of our nation, spanning centuries of history to the present day. It further reflects our shared journey over the years and commitment to building a shared future.

Chung May Khuen, Director of the National Museum of Singapore, said, “As we celebrate SG60, *Once Upon a Tide* offers a timely opportunity for us to reflect on our nation’s remarkable journey of progress and transformation that is shaped by its connections in the region and beyond. These values of openness and interconnectedness remain relevant and crucial today, as we constantly adapt and innovate to navigate a landscape that is highly globalised and increasingly turbulent. We hope this exhibition will inspire Singaporeans to think about the collective future they envision for our nation.”

Ms Tan Su-Yin, Senior Director (Grants), Tote Board, shared: “Tote Board is honoured to play a role in commemorating Singapore’s 60th year of independence through our support of various SG60 programmes. At the heart of these celebrations is *Once Upon a Tide*, which chronicles Singapore’s remarkable transformation. The exhibition is a testament to our collective achievements and the unwavering spirit that has defined Singapore’s progress over six decades. Through our support of *Once Upon a Tide* and other SG60 initiatives, Tote Board continues our commitment to fostering social cohesion and celebrating our shared heritage. These programmes provide platforms for Singaporeans to come together, reflect on our journey, and strengthen the bonds that make our society uniquely Singaporean.”

Ashmita Acharya, Head of International Wealth and Premier Banking at HSBC Singapore, said, “As Principal Sponsor of *Once Upon a Tide*, HSBC is proud to play a part in celebrating Singapore’s remarkable growth from a small fishing village to a global financial powerhouse –a journey we’ve been a part of since opening our first branch here along the busy port of Singapore 148 years ago. Our support of this exhibition underscores our continued commitment towards fostering meaningful international connections, partnering businesses, and opening opportunities that contribute to the next chapter of the nation’s growth at this pivotal moment in history.”

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Section One: Always on the Map

The exhibition brings visitors across five immersive sections representing different aspects of Singapore's evolution that are brought to life through experiential storytelling. The journey begins with the first section, **Always on the Map**, which traces our island's deep historical roots and highlights

Singapore's prominence on a regional and global scale long before settlement by the British in 1819. Stepping into the section, visitors walk under the sloping arches of a monumental digital projection of waves crashing onto shores – a sight likely familiar to the early people who arrived here. This section features key artefacts that showcase Singapore's strategic position at the crossroads of global flows, and its status as one of the key port settlements in the Malay world and Chinese trade network. Visitors can engage in a digital *Find Your Singapore* experience, where they can search for Singapore across different historical maps.



Visitors can take on the Sampan Challenge in Section Two: The River Road

In **The River Road**, visitors can sail through the history of the Singapore River, whose own evolution mirrors the story of Singapore's economic development. Once the lifeblood of our early settlement, the

river played a vital role in shaping our transformation into an international hub, fuelling the development of industries such as coaling and shipbuilding to become an iconic symbol of our nation's progress. Today, we continue to celebrate Singapore's diversity, and as a place with opportunities for all. Visitors can discover a range of artefacts highlighting the river's vibrant past. For some added fun, visitors can take on the *Sampan Challenge* and "row across" the Singapore River, skillfully navigating past other vessels and battling the elements to safely deliver their passengers to their destination.

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Section Three: Expanding Horizons

Complementing this narrative is **Expanding Horizons**, a section that sheds light on Singapore's rigorous focus on creative land planning to overcome the inherent restraints of our limited physical size. This section features artefacts that reflect these efforts, including a letter from Sir Stamford

Raffles to the town planning committee and a panoramic painting of Singapore's skyline in 1976. Here, visitors can interact with a digital slider map that visually traces Singapore's changing coastlines across the centuries, charting the long history of reclamation to our colonial times.



Section Four: Flows of People

Recognising that multiculturalism is the bedrock of Singapore's identity, **Flows of People** pays tribute to the individuals who laid the foundation for Singapore's cosmopolitan development, from early settlers to today's modern workers. The section examines the lived experiences of the people who built our nation, provided transport services, defended it, and cared for others within society. Through intimate audio and video testimonials, visitors can hear directly from and be inspired by members of these communities. Photographic artefacts and personal mementos offer insight into the various tools of the trades, and a slice of the diversity of those who helped build the nation. This section also draws parallels between equivalent occupations in the past and present, from construction workers to caregivers, showing how these essential roles have evolved while continuing to play a vital role in Singapore's ongoing story.

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Section Five: Making Waves

Finally, the exhibition culminates in **Making Waves**, a section dedicated to spotlighting Singaporeans, homegrown businesses and organisations that have made waves globally across the areas of diplomacy, humanitarian efforts, innovation and hub development from 1965 to the present day.

Visitors are invited to discover the stories of trailblazers who followed the road less travelled, redefining success and shaping an ever-evolving Singaporean identity on the global stage. From Singlish words making it into the Oxford Dictionary to local dishes being celebrated around the world, this section celebrates the unique local expressions that have gained international recognition. Visitors can also take part in an interactive Singlish quiz to test their knowledge of our Singaporean language that has become a cultural marker of pride.

A diverse range of artefacts documenting Singapore's achievements across multiple fields are on display as tangible reminders of our global prominence. Some of the individuals featured in this section are, pianist Margaret Leng Tan, filmmaker Eric Khoo, and athletes including Loh Kean Yew, Shanti Pereira, Joseph Schooling, and Maximilian Maeder, among others. Visitors inspired by the showcase of stories and artefacts in this section are also invited to contribute objects and stories as part of the museum's Collecting Contemporary Singapore initiative that returns this year with a focus on "wave makers". The contributions will help the National Museum build up our collection and tell more diverse stories of Singaporeans who make us proud globally. More information on this public call is available on the National Museum's [website](#).

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Visitors can contribute their visions to the future of Singapore through an RFID-based personalised experience.

To round off their experience, visitors are invited to reflect on how Singapore's identity and definition of success have evolved over time through an RFID-based personalised experience. Questions are interspersed across the exhibition sections, and visitors can use RFID wristbands collected at the start

of the exhibition to answer them. At the end of the exhibition, visitors will be assigned one of four avatars based on their responses throughout the experience. As each avatar reflects one's individual values, priorities, and aspirations for Singapore's future, they contribute to a larger cityscape visual that represents the collective vision of Singapore's tomorrow, co-created by all who participate.

Younger audiences and families can embark on self-guided visits with the exhibition's 11 Waves of Wonder family-friendly captions that are co-created with educators from My First Skool. Each caption contains bite-sized information and a mission-based activity to encourage children to get curious about the artefacts. To encourage young visitors and students with additional needs to better engage with the exhibition's content, the National Museum has also created a complementary and purpose-built Programmes Cart with age-appropriate hands-on activities that pre-school and special needs schools can use during their self-guided visits to the exhibition. Complementary resources will also be progressively available for student groups of various levels.

On the opening weekend and throughout the exhibition period, there will also be complementary programming such as workshops, talks and tours inspired by the content in the exhibition, designed to spark intergenerational exchange.

Visitors can also purchase a complementary publication titled ***Once Upon a Tide: Stories of the Singapore River and Surrounding Seas***, a collection of 10 insightful essays written by the National Museum's curatorial team that explores the milestones and memories of the namesake river at the heart of our city, brought to life with a rich selection of images and objects from our National Collection.

In an extension of the exhibition, the National Museum will release a limited-edition collection of keychain plushies featuring the four avatars, available exclusively at the museum shop from June 2025.

Introducing younger visitors to the builders of Singapore



Jointly opening to the public on the same weekend is the National Museum's highly anticipated Children's Season, returning with ***Get Curious! Building Our Singapore***. Designed as a complement to *Once Upon a Tide*, this year's Children's Season continues the journey of discovery for young visitors, especially around the themes of the people who built Singapore and how we continue to build

our identity and ‘make waves’ internationally, in tandem with the exhibition’s sections *Flows of People & Making Waves*. This year’s edition features an interactive installation and an intergenerational showcase – *Get Curious! Building Our Singapore* and *Our Mama Shop* showcase. The installation invites children to explore how different communities contributed to shaping our nation. Young visitors can interact with a world map that traces routes of common countries of origin of migrants and dress up as key migrant roles at an archival photo backdrop area. In partnership with Migrant & Me, families can also write a thank you card to migrant workers in Singapore today.

To help visitors connect over our common Singaporean identity and uniquely local cultural elements, the National Museum has also put together the *Our Mama Shop* showcase. In collaboration with The Artground, the showcase features artworks related to the theme of a mama (provision) shop jointly created by pre-schoolers from My First Skool at 219 Serangoon Avenue 2 and senior adults from St Luke’s Eldercare (Serangoon Centre), sparking intergenerational conversations on how Singapore can continue to build our shared identity and culture. These experiences are further enriched by a range of self-facilitated and in-depth engagement programmes tailored for children aged 3 and above. Families can look forward to film screenings, interactive storytelling, character meet and greet sessions and The River Hunt, a mission-based activity that encourages children to learn more about Singapore’s history in a fun and immersive way.

Once Upon a Tide opens this week so get ready for an immersive experience for you and family!

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