

Tangible Legacies





Old Kwong Hock Keong Temple

Early Chinese settlement in Nibong Tebal can be traced to this lovely temple, where an old stone plaque marks its date of establishment as 1866. Established through the collective effort of immigrant settlers, it is dedicated to the worship of the Taoist deity Tua Pek Kong (God of Prosperity), possibly as a gesture of thanks for the community's success. The temple is said to have previously served as a place to gather socially, to register births and deaths, and to resolve conflicts or cases of missing livestock.

2 Old Town Jetty

In the 1850's, sugar cane was transported by boat along the river and canals in Nibong Tebal to factories for processing and export. Boats docking at this jetty also transported raw materials such as timber from Kedah. This jetty was notorious for smuggling goods from the tax-free port of Penang into southern Province Wellesley. The jetty fell into disuse after World War II, and today serves recreational uses such as angling, firefly viewing and makan angin.



Source: Leiden University Library, KITLV 80009



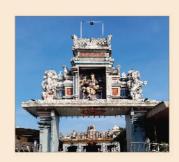


Nibong Tebal Old Town

The 1800's mark the beginnings of Nibong Tebal's old town, which developed at the site of the old jetty. Old warehouse buildings, single-storey godowns and the presence of an old market point to early commercial activity around the jetty. Gradually, a grid of new streets shaped the growth of the old town and its main drive called High Street (Jalan Atas). In its heyday, the old town offered all the necessary services. Fading signboards and old building facades indicate an early Chinese school, a metalworking shop, a bicycle shop, a hair salon as well as businesses selling coffins, biscuits and medicine

🔼 | Sri Sithi Vinayagar Devasthanam

In the first half of the 1900's, the British brought in large numbers of labourers from southern India to work on Nibong Tebal's rubber estates. When their numbers outgrew the estates' small makeshift shrines, the Hindu community set up a temple in the town with the support of local donors and the colonial government. Constructed in 1924, the temple was dedicated to the revered elephant-headed deity Lord Ganesha, who is worshipped as Sri Sithi Vinayagar. The temple continues to serve the local Hindu community's spiritual, social or welfare needs.







Oil Palm Plantations

Tracts of low-lying flat land interspersed between rivers and streams make Nibong Tebal a prime location for the cultivation of crops. The plantation economy began in the 1800s with sugarcane. Early Chinese sugar planters exported processed sugar to Hong Kong and China while British planters supplied the European market. Sugarcane plantations gave way to rubber estates in the 1900's, and rubber was supplanted by oil palm from the 1970's. Since the 1990's, these estates have been subdivided and sold often resulting in workers who have been displaced from their homes and jobs, to move to town and to new occupations.



🚯 | Mariamman Temple and Estate Community

Some estate workers and their families, displaced by the sale of the plantations in which they worked and lived, were fortunate enough to be rehoused. The rehoused families from the old Caledonia Estate continue to enjoy their culture and lifestyle, thanks to nearby amenities such as a temple, local coffee shop and grazing field for their cows and goats. At the Annai Arulmigu Maha Mariamman Temple, both spiritual and social events are celebrated. Every March, the temple commemorates the birth of its patron deity Mariamman with the fire-walking festival Thimithi and a chariot procession.





Tanjung Berembang River Crossing

In the past, a sampan service, costing half a cent, operated at this river crossing. This ferrying service, carrying both passengers and their bicycles, was the popular means for going between town and village due to its convenience and affordability. However, motorcycles became more common and popular as a faster mode of transportation in the 1990s. Finally, a pedestrian bridge built in 2010 superseded the use of sampan as a mode of local transportation. Today the jetty area is used by locals for the sale of fish and other river products. Several seafood restaurants popular among locals are also located by the jetty.





8 Sungai Acheh Paddy Fields

These verdant paddy fields have been the livelihood of local farmers since the 1700s. During the 1890s, the British introduced an irrigation system drawing from Sungai Kerian in an effort to increase rice yields to feed the growing labour population. Since the 2000's, rice farmers have shifted from traditional and cooperative farming methods towards modern engineering and technology for greater efficiency. However, they face new challenges as the waterways flowing through their fields are now shallower and polluted by effluent from fish farms. Farmers must now draw water from the upper reaches of the river to irrigate their fields.



Sungai Udang Boardwalk

The boardwalk, roughly half a kilometre long, runs parallel to the banks of Sungai Kerian just before the river meets the sea. On the water side of the boardwalk fishing boats are moored to landing platforms. The land side is lined with the makeshift homes of the local fishing community. Their activities are visible on both sides of the boardwalk at different times of the day, including the washing of boats, mending of nets, drying of seafood, small cottage industries plying processed seafood and more.







Sungai Udang Jetty



Every day from around 10am to 1pm, a crowd of potential buyers including restaurant owners, fish vendors and household shoppers gather at this jetty just as boats start to bring in freshly caught sea produce. Customers highly rate the freshness and quality of the seafood here. After the produce is unloaded, weighed and gathered into small piles on the floor, the auction begins. The auctioneer calls out a high starting price for each pile. Interested buyers (fearing competition) can stop the auctioneer to accept the price and secure the purchase. If there are no takers, the auctioneer calls out a lower price and this continues until the produce is sold.

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Mangrove Forest Education Center

In the last three decades, many mangrove forests have been cleared to make way for the development of fish farms, plantations and housing developments in Nibong Tebal.Local coastal fishermen concerned about threats to their livelihood due to these changes in the ecosystem came together to set up a mangrove replanting initiative. This mangrove rehabilitation has helped conserve river banks and coastlines and provided a crucial nursery ground for young fish. This area has been gazetted as a forest reserve since 2022.

2 | Sungai Chenaam Jetty

Sungai Chenaam and its estuary, which are lined by mangrove forests, boast of a natural ecosystem teeming with fish and bird life. Local fishermen operating in the sea nearby enjoy a variety of harvest according to the seasons and tides. This jetty is more than just a spot for landing sea or river produce, but also serves as a mooring point and boat repair space. Tapping into the environmental assets of the area, the community has begun small-scale eco-tourism initiatives. As part of the river rehabilitation programme called 'Denai Sungai Kebangsaan', a wooden bridge was built for visitors to enjoy the calming beauty of this place.





(13) Malay Kampung Houses

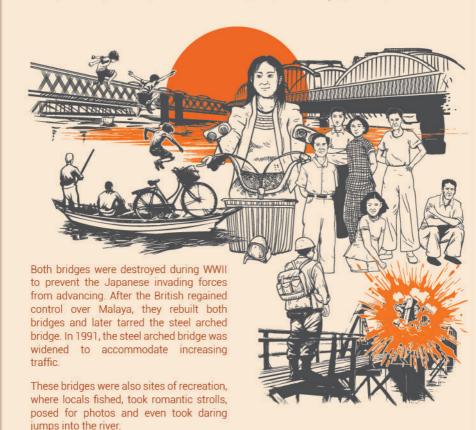
The paddy fields by Sungai Acheh are dotted with farmer's houses, some retaining architectural elements of traditional village houses while others have been modified for modern living. As the local Malay population have ancestors from Perak, Kedah and Acheh, the village houses here incorporate a range of architectural influences from these locations. These vernacular features include the A-roof frame or five-ridge roof, the stilt house structure, and the entrance staircase leading to the verandah or serambi.



BRIDGES OVER THE KERIAN RIVER

Residents of Nibong Tebal often fondly recall the two historic bridges built by the British: an iron railway bridge and a steel arched bridge. These bridges were symbols of the town's prominence in the early 1900s.

The iron railway bridge was built across Sungai Kerian in 1900 to extend the Perai Railway Line from Penang to Perak. In 1925, a steel arched bridge was built to improve access between the two parts of Nibong Tebal, that were separated by the river. This bridge featured a weight-bearing steel arch, a flat deck for vehicles, and pavements for cyclist and pedestrians.



In 2009, the iron railway bridge was removed and the train station was moved. Later, the steel arched bridge was replaced by a modern concrete road bridge.

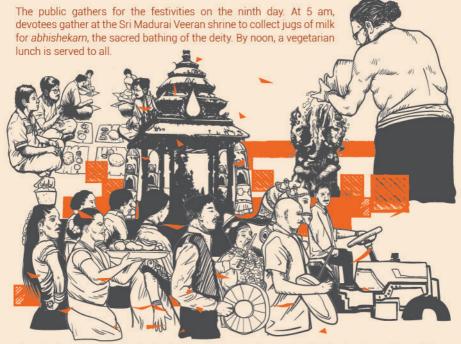
VINAYAGAR CHATURTHI CELEBRATION





Every year, the Sri Sithi Vinayagar Devasthanam in Nibong Tebal celebrates Vinayagar Chaturthi, honouring the birthday of Lord Ganesha. Once the festival date is set, flyers requesting donations are distributed to local residents.

Nine days before the celebration, a yellow flag is raised, reminding devotees to begin a vegetarian diet in preparation for the celebration. Over the next eight days, different groups sponsor prayers at the temple.

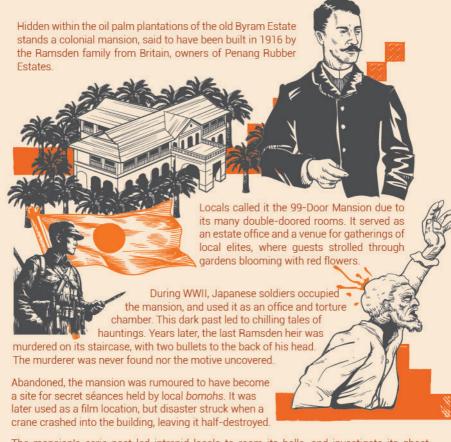


The chariot procession begins in the late afternoon. The *murti* or idol is placed on a beautifully decorated chariot, now pulled by a tractor instead of cows, and paraded through town. On the first day, the procession travels through Victoria, Byram, and Caledonia Estates. On the second day, it moves through Taman Bukit Panchor and Krian Estate. Devotees offer prayers along the way.

On the 12th day, final rituals are performed, and the flag is lowered. This marks the end of Vinayagar Chaturthi—a festival that continues to unite and bless the community.



MYSTERIES OF THE 99 DOOR MANSION

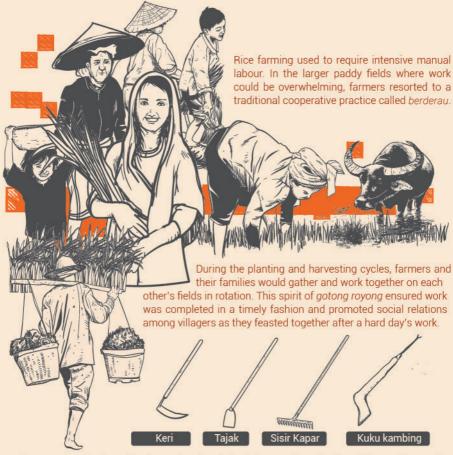


The mansion's eerie past led intrepid locals to roam its halls, and investigate its ghost stories. Though now sealed off for safety reasons, the legend of the 99-Door Mansion still lingers in the minds of those who grew up in its shadow.



TRADITIONAL PADDY FARMING IN SUNGAI ACHEH

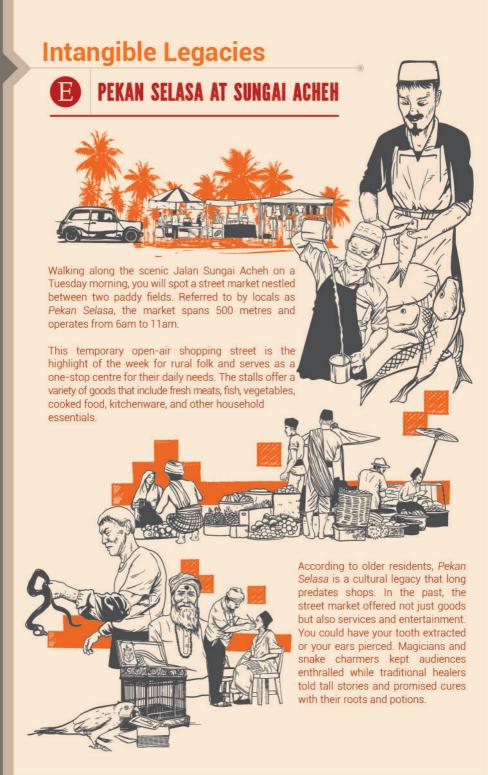




Farmers also developed their own handmade tools for weeding, planting, tilling and harvesting in the soft, swampy land.

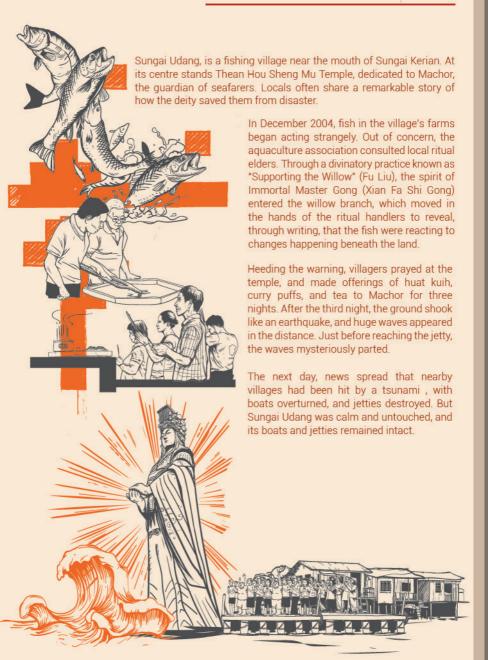
More recently, local farmers have mechanized much of the work. This includes leasing tractors for ploughing fields and unmanned drones for spraying fertilizers and pesticides. Some farmers have also begun to hire outside labour to work on their farms.





THE TSUNAMI MIRACLE







Nibong Tebal Cultural Heritage Project

This booklet is the result of collaboration with various communities in Nibong Tebal, who have generously shared their local wisdom and stories that have shaped the cultural identity of the community here. This project is part of the Seberang Perai Small Towns Grants Programme.

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Rural Nibong Tebal

The fertile, water-rich plains of the Kerian River Basin are ideal for paddy farming and fishing. Starting in the 1850s, people from Kedah, Patani, Borneo and Indonesia settled here. The traditional livelihood practices of rice farming and fishing have shaped the rural landscape and local lifestyle, particularly in the western part of Nibong Tebal. Farmers lived in small villages next to stretches of paddy fields and largely continue to do so. Their practice of paddy farming received a boost in the mid-1890s with the introduction of the Kerian Irrigation Scheme. The irrigation system was reconstructed in the 1960s to allow farmers to plant

River and sea fishing activities in the area are marked by colourful boats moving leisurely up and down the rivers and by the many landing letties. Wild catch is sold for local consumption. Meanwhile, around 60 industrial fish farms, concentrated in Sungai Udang, export their produce to other Malaysian towns, neighbouring countries and Australia.

Tangible Legacies

Intangible Legacies

Historical Timeline

Early Malay Settlements

Malays were the earliest settlers in practised subsistence farming and



Early Chinese Settlements

ncluded Teochews escaping poverty in China. They practised



<u> 1800s</u>

British Colonization

he British acquired Province Welleslev from Kedah and commodified the land for colonial was the main collection and dispersal agriculture. In this period, British planters invested in sugarcane



1830s

Nibong Tebal Old Town

The old town of Nibong Tebal began around the Nibong Tebal Jetty which point for agricultural goods on Sunga



1850s

Labour Migration from India and the Malay Archipelago

The British brought in Tamils from British India as indentured labour to work on their plantations. Migrants from other islands



were Khaw Boo Aun, a Teochew man

who owned sugarcane and tobacco

fields, and Ramsden, a British man

who owned the Penang Sugar

The biggest planters in this period

After the border between Perak and Province Wellesley was redrawn following the Pangkor Treaty of 1874, the British launched the 'Krian traditional Malay livelihoods and to

1900s

Early River Scaling Up **Paddy Farming** Transportation

Sungai Kerian was the main waterway in Nibong Tebal. Raw goods and people were transported by sampan. Later, passenger boats (such as the Tanjung



The Rubber Boom and Indian Settlements

Plantations switched to rubber and other crops when the price of sugar began to fall. South Indian labourers were recruited to work on rubber plantations for longer terms and provided with housing. Man



1930s Expansion

of the old town The old town expanded to include Jalan

Atas, Lorong Boo Aun, Jalan Baru and Jalan Pintu Sepuluh as businessmen set up offices, warehouses and services suc as laundry and barber shops.



<u> 1948</u>

Malayan

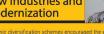
Emergency

Independence <a> of Malaya

1957

After World War II, anti-colonia sentiments motivated the British to se their plantations to local buyers. Locals grandson of the British planter, Ramsden, at the large Byram Estate office known

New Industries and Modernization

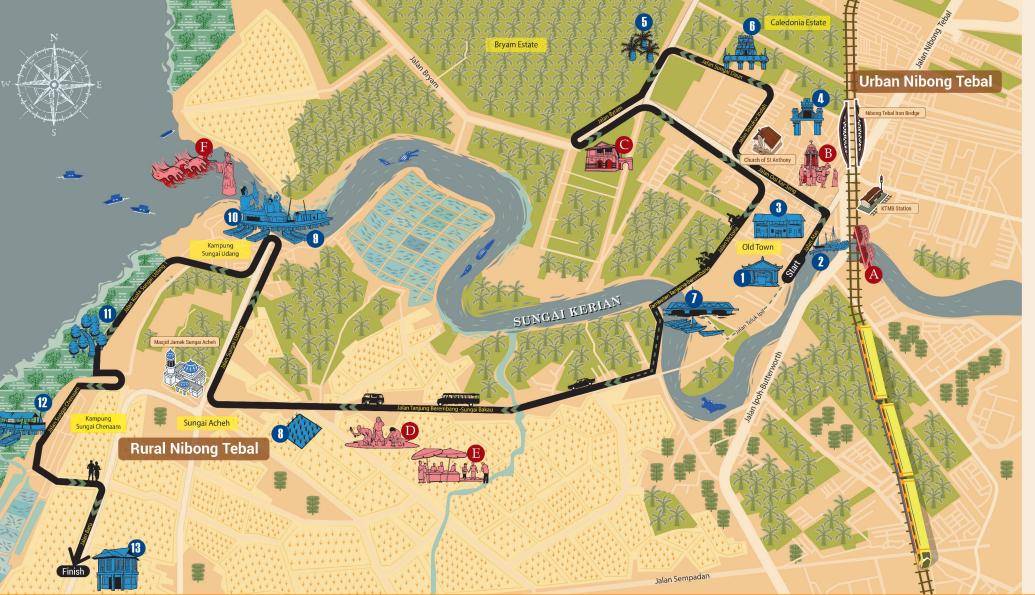












Urban Nibong Tebal

By the mid-1800s, Chinese and European businessmen began to realize the value of land as a commercial commodity. These businessmen bought the larger rice fields from farmers and began planting sugarcane on a large scale. Sugarcane was later replaced by rubber in the early 1900's and then by oil palm between the late 1900's and early 2000s.

Migrants from China, India, and the Malay Archipelago arrived to work on these estates and in related businesses. As rivers and canals were essential means of transport for raw materials and daily necessities, business formed near the main jetty. By the early 1900's, the lively hub around the jetty flourished into a small town that provided various goods and services and included schools, hospitals, and places of worship.

While plantations are a fixture of Nibong Tebal's landscape, many have since been restructured and sold. Their workers have had to move to town or find factory jobs in light industrial zones. The town of Nibong Tebal is now surrounded by sprawling suburbs containing a population of about 40,000 residents.

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Old Kwong Hock Keong
Temple

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Old Town Jetty







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