



Remembering Singapore's World War II History

Revamped displays at the Former Ford Factory museum: an excellent place to start

By Bill Poorman

For a history buff like myself, Singapore is a fascinating place to live. The entire island is like a World War II museum, thanks to its strategic importance prior to the war and, sadly, because of the fighting that took place here.

The United Kingdom had heavily fortified Singapore in order to counter the rising power of Japan. It was viewed as impregnable. That made it a top target. The Japanese campaign to take Singapore started at the same time as the attack on Pearl Harbor, but here it was December 8, 1941. They landed on the Malay Peninsula and worked their way down. Ultimately, following pitched battles on Singapore itself, the British command made the decision to surrender. The Japanese had set up their headquarters in the Ford Motor Company factory near Bukit Timah. On February 15, 1942, the British commander walked there under a white flag.

The factory has been a museum of the Japanese occupation since 2006, but it was closed for a year for revamping, only opening again this past February. There was some controversy with the new design. Originally, it was titled Syonan Gallery (pronounced sho-nahn). The Japanese had renamed Singapore *Syonan-to*, meaning "Light of the South" during the occupation. After the museum's new name debuted, there was a public outcry. The signs were soon changed to Former Ford Factory, and the exhibit was re-titled *Surviving the Japanese Occupation: War and its Legacies*.

When you visit the museum, you enter the front part of the original factory complex, which has been preserved. In the main foyer is some history of the factory itself. To your left, you enter into the main exhibit. It's well done, with a mix of artifacts, displays and videos.

A highlight is the actual room where the surrender took place. Most intriguing to me was a display that had a transcript of the surrender itself. The two sides haggled over the exact moment when the shooting should stop and what would happen to captured personnel and civilians. It helped me to feel the tension, aggression, fear and humiliation of the moment.

Beyond that room are more displays covering the occupation, including a powerful oral history video of the massacres that took place of the people whom the Japanese military considered threats. After passing through a history of the end of the war, you come back to the main entrance. There is a second half to the museum that is equally interesting. It covers Singapore's post-war recovery efforts and the lead up to independence in 1965.

On the day I visited, I surveyed the displays before joining an hour-long guided tour, but you could easily spend half a day just on your own reading and taking in all of the information and artifacts. There is no entry fee for Singaporeans and Permanent Residents; it cost me \$3 to get in, but the guided tour was free. While there, make sure to pick up a helpful booklet at the front counter called *Singapore in World War II: A Heritage Trail*. As I mentioned, the entire island can be viewed as a museum, and the guide lists 50 different sites to visit, which is certainly enough to keep even avid history buffs like myself busy for a long time.

Bill Poorman is a writer and has lived in Singapore for nearly three years. He's also a history buff. Did he mention that?

Photos courtesy of Bill Poorman



**International
Medical Clinic**

**International Doctors
Caring for You**



*"I joined IMC Paediatric
over 5 years ago.
It's the combination
of professionalism and
care that makes
the difference."*

- Dr Leo



Dr Leo Hamilton;
MD (Alabama, US), Board Cert (Paed) (US).

International Medical Clinic (IMC) specialises in family, paediatric and travel medicine. IMC has provided medical care in Singapore for over 17 years and is a trusted medical provider for the international community. With three General Practice Clinics and a specialist Paediatric Clinic, IMC strives to provide a high standard of healthcare in a caring, friendly and familiar environment.

Camden

1 Orchard Boulevard
#14-06 Camden Medical Centre
Singapore 248649
T 6733 4440
E camden@imc-healthcare.com

Jelita

293 Holland Road
#02-04 Jelita Cold Storage
Singapore 278628
T 6465 4440
E jelita@imc-healthcare.com

Katong

88 East Coast Road
#02-07 Katong Square
Singapore 423371
T 6342 4440
E katong@imc-healthcare.com

Paediatric

1 Orchard Boulevard
#11-06 Camden Medical Centre
Singapore 248649
T 6887 4440
E paediatric@imc-healthcare.com

www.imc-healthcare.com