

The Reporter in writing this article wrongly wrote API's Organisation name. Here we have corrected the error



## Regular Haunts



Join JOANNA YAP on a fright night tour with Charles Goh of Asia Paranormal Investigators.



THE NIGHT WAS SUITABLY OVERCAST for the venture we were about to undertake, with rain having just fallen, leaving the late evening sky tinged with a purplish hue. About 20 of us were on a mission to uncover some of the most haunted places in Singapore , in search of the sites and stories of urban legends.

For the ghost tour that day, Charles Goh from the Asia Paranormal Investigators was our guide. Dressed appropriately in an all-black ensemble, he and his assistant got the evening off to a scary start, spooking us with stories about the first place on our itinerary, the Spirit Tree.

## Changi

Legend has it that an old man, respectfully named Datuk, inhabits the tree, hence the tree's other moniker as the Datuk Tree. According to Charles, many devotees still make pilgrimages all the way to Changi to pray to this tree to grant their wishes. Attesting to its 'effectiveness', Charles tells us that he himself had a personal encounter with the tree a few years ago.



An old man with a walking stick appeared to him in a dream, with four lucky numbers. He spent \$50 that weekend buying 4D tickets, but to his dismay, did not win anything. But a few days later, on a Wednesday, he decided to try his luck again, this time resisting the temptation to bet big. Putting down just \$5, he won to his surprise, \$1250. The same thing happened to a friend who won the same exact amount after also dreaming about the old man from the tree.

By the time we arrived at the Changi site we were pretty much steeped in the tree's legend but nothing quite prepared us for the sight of the tree itself, standing its ground amid a vast empty patch of land. Oddly shaped, the tree is actually a Pulai tree, which the Malays believed can house the Pontianak spirit, and the Indians to make coffins.

Lightning streaked the sky as we approached, and for a moment it felt as we had entered a very realistic horror movie set! To mark it as a holy site, the tree bears a golden yellow sash around its trunk.

The area around the tree is quite a sight to behold. All around the base of the tree are deities from the four major ethnic groups. There are shrines housing the Datuk, Tua Pek Kong, the Indian goddess Amman and the beloved Ganesh. A symbolic lion's lair was also recently added to protect the grounds.

Ensnared by the eerily silent surrounds, the group huddled closer and made a hasty retreat to the bus after Charles told us we had to hurry as we were not supposed to be wearing footwear on the grounds.

## Punggol

Our interest and curiosity piqued, we made our way to Matilda House, a landmark no doubt familiar to the residents of Punggol. The fenced-in mansion cuts a solitary figure on the vacant plot of land besides the MRT station.



Rundown and dark, Charles also had tales of people having seen 4D numbers at this site, making us wonder if we were indeed on a ghost trail or a trek to source out the best places to get 4D numbers in Singapore!

Also dubbed the Waiting House, the forlorn old structure did indeed look like it was awaiting the return of something or someone, creating an even more ominous feeling. We parked by the side of the road and tried to make our way nearer to the house but our progress was impeded by a natural moat of water that surrounded the area, making it impossible for us to get nearer.

Even the sight of the structure from a considerable distance was enough to creep us. Expecting a grisly murder story to accompany this mysterious house, we were disappointed to hear that the reason the house still stands today is that it has been deemed a conservation and heritage building, awaiting proposals for its development.

## Upper Bukit Timah

From one abandoned house to another, we made our way across the island to the Hillview Mansion and Keramat Syed Ismail, a shrine tucked into a patch of grass that flanks a stretch of main road in Bukit Timah. Inconspicuous by day, the small plot glows with lighted candles at night.



Resembling a grave, the plot is a rectangular structure demarcated by granite blocks, in the centre of which is placed a piece of yellow cloth strewn with an assortment of flowers that left a lingering sweet floral scent in the air. Token monetary offerings were also spotted, a sign that devotees had come to pray with a special request.

Charles tells us that the site was exhumed some years ago when construction began in the surrounding area but no body was found in the grave. Believers say that the religious man who had been buried there

had ascended to become a deity leaving no traces of his remains.

Atop Singapore 's shortest but steepest hill lies the forsaken Hillview Mansion . All that is left of the place now is its imposing scary black, rusty gate topped with menacing barbed wire. There was nothing to behold beyond the darkness as the original had been demolished so we stayed in the bus and peered out.

Nestled in a quiet and unassuming neighbourhood, this house really has a grisly history. The story goes that the boss of a car distributorship had bought the house for a female companion and she had fallen to her death while inspecting the construction of the house.

Since then, the property has changed several times but none of the owners seemed to have done anything with the land, which is estimated to be the size of 100 4-room HDB flats put together.

But the lot of us were more preoccupied with the tour bus's ability to ascend and descend the steep slope leading to the house, with someone remarking that the ride down the slope itself was well worth the ticket price for the tour!

## **Bukit Gomak**

At a nearby estate in Bukit Gomak, we were shown an entire cluster of HDB blocks that lay vacant. Groups who have visited this place have reported hearing the sounds of people quarrelling, a radio blaring and seen lights in some units.

The dark empty windows that stared out at us held the promise of something exciting but we were disappointed. Gates has been put up to seal the stairs, denying us access. But through the iron structure we could see the glowing light of the lift button suspended at the 6 th floor, leaving us to wonder why if someone had gone up to that level, did they not come down?

## **Lim Chu Kang**

We ended the evening with a trip to the Lim Chu Kang Chinese cemetery, the last place left to bury the dead in Singapore . With the lights turned off, the bus was plunged into total darkness as we drove through the graves and stopped at the cemetery temple.

Some distance away, spotting candlelight among the gravestones, we approached a small group of people who were burning incense, to observe their prayer rituals. The two men burned joss sticks and lit candles along the pathways, a mark for wandering spirits to find their way.

According to Charles, the cemetery is often alive with activity at night and especially during the seventh month Hungry Ghost Festival.

Though the closest we came to a paranormal encounter was a neatly placed pair of blue slippers leading to the Spirit Tree seemingly to belong to no one, the tour has been an enjoyable and interesting one if only to discover that Singapore is rich with legends and lore.

**You think our little island is boring? Take a ride with Charles sometime.**

**For more information on tour packages, visit our Unusual Tours page or email us at [events@api.sg](mailto:events@api.sg)**