

Guided trail to offer glimpse of WWII in Singapore



A plaque at NUS University Town marks the site where 10 allied commandos were executed by the Japanese after a failed operation in 1944. This is one of the stops along The Last Days of Empire trail, one of 11 tours open to the public from Feb 16 to March 12. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Last Days of Empire walk among various activities planned to mark 75th anniversary of Fall of S'pore

Raynold Toh

Walking for three hours to an old Japanese war shrine in sweltering heat on a battle anniversary is something prisoners of war would do. From Feb 16 to March 12, the public will get the chance to experience this and other similar journeys on a walking tour.

This guided trail, named The Last

Days of Empire, is one of 11 organised by the National Heritage Board (NHB) and other partners to mark the 75th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore on Feb 15, 1942, when the Japanese occupation began during World War II.

Besides the tours, other activities organised as part of the commemorative event – titled Battle for Singapore and themed “resilience” – include talks and exhibitions at museums and heritage centres under the Museum Roundtable.

It is an NHB-led initiative set up in 1996 to develop a stronger museum-going culture in Singapore.

The 11 guided tours include sites such as the old Command House;

key military installations constructed by the British such as Labrador battery; Gillman Barracks and Alexandra Barracks; and a night tour of Pasir Panjang.

The NHB yesterday gave the media a preview of The Last Days of Empire – a three-hour walking tour starting at the University Cultural Centre in the National University of Singapore. It will take participants to a World War II memorial plaque marking the site where 10 allied commandos in Operation Rimau were executed by the Japanese after a failed operation.

The tour will end at the Old Ford Factory, the site where British forces surrendered Singapore to

the Japanese army on Feb 15, 1942. The national monument is set to reopen on Feb 16 after a year-long revamp, featuring never-before-seen archival materials.

NUS historian Mohamed Effendy, who is leading the tour along with students, said participants will be in for a few surprises about the war. For example, some Japanese publications recognised and appreciated the valour of the commandos, who “went to their deaths laughing”.

“The main message we want participants to leave with is that we are responsible for our own defence,” he told the media yesterday.

Other activities include a special exhibition – Celebrating 50 Years

of National Service – held at the Army Museum located in Jurong East.

Members of the Eurasian Association will lead guided tours of the Eurasian Heritage Centre to provide greater insights on what the community went through during World War II.

The association will also hold a talk by war survivors.

The public can visit www.museums.com.sg for more information, and will be able to sign up for the Battle for Singapore 2017 programmes from 10am on Monday. Tour slots will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

raynoldt@sph.com.sg