

# Fort Canning exhibition site to get revamp

Discovery of rare ceramic coincides with news of \$500k update for archaeological display

Venessa Lee

On the same day the National Parks Board (NParks) announced plans for an update to the exhibition site of an archaeological dig at Fort Canning Park, a team found a rare piece of Thai ceramic.

The dig, which started on Sept 2 and ended yesterday, was exploring portions that had been left intact during earlier excavations when it found the ceramic piece, only the second such piece found in the area.

NParks announced yesterday that the exhibition site will be updated for the first time in 17 years.

In the past few months, artefacts such as thousands of glass beads from China's Yuan Dynasty, as well as porcelain, earthenware and stoneware, have been found at the

historically significant site, which is believed to have housed a 14th-century palace workshop.

The enhancements will include more hands-on interactive features, such as a sand pit for simulated archaeological activities, as well as an open space for workshops.

There will also be new information panels and display showcases on the soil layers at the site and artefacts found there. The multimedia educational panels on the artefacts, including recent discoveries, will give a glimpse of what life on Fort Canning Hill was like.

A new outdoor garden is also in the works. The site, which will be renamed Artisan's Garden, will be closed from next month and re-open in June next year. The cost of refreshing the site is about \$500,000, NParks said.

The improved Archaeological Dig

exhibition is part of enhancement plans for Fort Canning Park announced by NParks in February this year. The park will be the venue of the main showcase for Singapore's bicentennial next year.

"We hope to cultivate interest in the heritage of this hill," said NParks' group director for Fort Canning Park and Istana Wong Tuan Wah.

Previously announced plans include the recreation of three historical gardens, with flora such as rambutan, nutmeg and cloves.

There will also be better accessibility, such as two sets of sheltered escalators linking Fort Canning MRT station to the top of the hill. NParks is also exploring the possibility of closing a portion of Canning Rise for improved pedestrian access.

The significance of the site became apparent again when an archaeological dig near the park's

Spice Garden led to the discovery of the Thai ceramic piece.

Organised by NParks, in partnership with veteran archaeologist John Miksic from the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University's Associate Professor Goh Geok Yian, the dig explored portions that had been left intact during earlier excavations.

Professor Miksic said the latest discovery points to interactions between Temasek, as Singapore was once known, and Thailand in the 14th century.

Prof Goh added: "It's important for Singaporeans to think about being part of South-east Asia. Most students often think that Singapore doesn't have a long history, beyond 200 years ago."

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NTU student Caroline Ang, 24 (above), a history major, holding up the rare piece of Thai ceramic that she found yesterday at the Fort Canning archaeological site, where she was digging with Associate Professor Goh Geok Yian (far left). PHOTOS: LIAHHE ZAOBAO, MATTHIAS CHONG

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