

# HERITAGE STORIES

Kampong Gelam  
Heritage Businesses



# Documenting the Living Stories of Kampong Gelam

Kampong Gelam is a historic precinct that has been enriched by diverse heritage trades and businesses operating in the neighbourhood. To document and celebrate the precinct's heritage, the National Heritage Board conceptualised the Kampong Gelam Citizen Engagement Project in partnership with the Urban Redevelopment Authority. Working closely with volunteers, the unique stories behind each heritage business was documented from May to June 2022—uncovering details of their journey, their craft, and how they have contributed to Kampong Gelam's cultural identity.



The Sultan Mosque at North Bridge Road, c. 1938  
Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore,  
National Heritage Board

## A District of Colour and Life

Kampong Gelam is a canvas of colour. Its streets are lined up with brightly painted shophouses, contrasting starkly against a backdrop of high-rise buildings. The district is a curious blend of the old and new, with murals and urban art embellishing architecture from the 19th century and early 20th century. The conservation area is also home to two National Monuments—the Sultan Mosque and Istana Kampong Gelam.

## Rich and Diverse Living Heritage

Kampong Gelam has undergone a plethora of changes as Singapore developed over the years. Yet, this district has preserved its unique and distinct character.

Arab Street, which was a vibrant textile hub during the 1970s and 1980s, continues to be home to many businesses selling quality fabrics and traditional patterns like *batik*. Within the vicinity of the Sultan Mosque, Muslims visit shops selling accessories for the annual Hajj and Umrah, which are Islamic pilgrimages to the holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. In these shops, non-alcoholic perfumes used for religious activities are a common product. Businesses specialising in fragrances are one of Kampong Gelam's highlights that carry on the legacy of using oil as the base for their products, instead of alcohol. Family businesses that once sold food in pushcarts around Kampong Gelam are now established restaurants, selling traditional dishes such as the Minangkabau-style *nasi padang*.



Fabrics at Paramount Traders



Perfume bottles at  
Haji V Syed Thahir Trading



Nasi Padang at Rumah Makan Minang

## What is a Heritage Business?

For the purposes of this project, the team looked at businesses that have operated in Kampong Gelam for decades. The team also included younger businesses that maintain a skill, knowledge, or craft practice which contributes to Kampong Gelam's social and cultural identity.



Established in 2006, Kebaya by Ratianah was included as their business specialises in making traditional Malay garments such as baju kurung and kebaya.

## Volunteers From All Walks of Life

The volunteers came from all walks of life, but they had one main thing in common—an interest in Singapore's history. Each volunteer had to attend a training session and they worked in pairs to interview the business owners, transcribe and review the materials.

## Taking a Journey around Kampong Gelam

This booklet is a condensed version of stories published on Roots.sg and the product of the hard work by our volunteers. You can find the full stories of the 45 businesses on the online digital map accessible via the QR code.

At the heart of all these stories is a love for Kampong Gelam—a place where these businesses have spent decades in, a place where *kampung* spirit ties its close-knit community together.

The team hopes that this project will foster greater awareness of Kampong Gelam's heritage businesses and how they contribute to the precinct's cultural identity—come visit and support the different heritage businesses in Kampong Gelam!

The 45 featured businesses are those that agreed to participate in the documentation project. This is not an exhaustive list of all the heritage businesses in Kampong Gelam and being featured does not imply that a business is more important or has a longer history than other businesses.



Project volunteer Mr Abbas Khan (right) with Mr Bashir Khan (left), owner of Kampong Glam Cafe

Many volunteers appreciated the experience as it deepened their knowledge of Kampong Gelam. One of the volunteers, Ms Syazwani Amrun, summed her experience, saying,

*“Getting to hear first-hand the experiences of the shop owners and knowing how they are doing all they can to carry on their business despite all the challenges, have made me proud of our Singaporean heritage, and also made me more committed to support our local businesses.”*

Volunteers also felt enriched by meeting participants who shared the same mission. Another volunteer, Mr Abbas Khan, was heartened from his interactions, saying that

*“It was really nice to see so many individuals from various backgrounds being passionate about Singapore's history and heritage.”*

Visit the Digital Map



<https://go.gov.sg/kampong-gelam-citizen-engagement-project>



## Aik Bee Textile Co. 益美公司布莊

Location  
69 Arab Street

Established 1964 Business Type  
Textile

Aik Bee Textile Co.'s unassuming shophouse exterior in Arab Street belies its colourful interior stacked full of fabrics. Established in 1964, it was founded by current third-generation owner Ms Jasmine Hoo's late father-in-law and his brother. The brothers started selling textiles in a pushcart at a night market, before moving to a shophouse on Haji Lane, and later to the nearby Arab Street.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Aik Bee was one of the biggest fabric suppliers in Singapore for school uniforms. Aik Bee also enjoyed brisk sales for curtain fabrics as more Singaporeans were moving into public housing estates and they were keen to furnish their new flats. This period coincided with Arab Street's heyday. "People walked this street non-stop. It was very crowded." Jasmine recalls.

Times have changed since then for Singapore's textile trade, but what has remained unchanged for Aik Bee is the consistency of its textiles, sourced mainly from a reputable Japanese supplier.

Jasmine values the bond with the Kampong Gelam community and the reputation that Aik Bee has weaved for itself in Arab Street. "Everyone knows our name. We conduct business in a very sincere, honest, and transparent way."



## Bamadhaj Brothers

Location  
97 Arab Street

Established 1955 Business Type  
Textile

Bamadhaj Brothers specialises in selling the exquisite *Kasa Robia* fabric, or Swiss voile. It is a sheer and lightweight material that is often used to make traditional Malay garments. According to second-generation owner Mr Yacob Bamadhaj, the *Kasa Robia* fabric is known as the "Rolex" of the textile industry. "Maybe you bought it 20 to 30 years ago, still the colour won't run. The lustre and quality are there." Mr Yacob is 72 years old and has been working in the family business for more than four decades. It is an understatement to say that he knows the trade inside out.

The business partnership with his Swiss supplier for *Kasa Robia* goes as far back as the 1980s. Likewise, his relationship with long-time customers has extended to their children, who continue to buy *Kasa Robia* because of its quality. Keeping up with the times, the shop offers in-house tailoring services and sells ready-made clothes in another shop at Tanjong Katong Complex.

Although Mr Yacob joined the business out of duty to his father, he grew to love the trade. It has taken hard work, vision, and grit over the years for Bamadhaj Brothers to arrive at where it is today.

## Basharahil Bros Batik

**Location**  
101 Arab Street

**Established**  
1939

**Business Type**  
Textile

Regulars at this *batik* shop will recognise a portrait of an elegantly dressed Peranakan lady in traditional *sarong kebaya*. The shop's current third-generation owner Ms Warda Abd. Basharahil says this artwork has become an important identifier for the shop.

Established in 1939 by Warda's grandfather, Basharahil Bros Batik moved to its current address in the mid-1940s. The business began with selling *batik sarong*, mostly to the Peranakans, and expanded into wholesale, targeting major department stores and export markets like Malaysia, Thailand, and Japan. As the wholesale business environment became more challenging, Warda turned to ready-made garments such as men's shirts, women's dresses, and tablecloths. What has stayed the same is the business' focus on handmade *batik*, imported since the 1960s from Indonesia's *batik*-making region in Pekalongan, Central Java.

Though much has changed, Ms Warda wants customers to always remember that Basharahil Bros Batik is all about great service. When interested buyers want to have a better look at the *batik*, they are welcome to unfold the entire stretch of the *batik* fabric and take their time to choose the patterns they prefer. "We want the customers to remember that they felt comfortable here," she says.



## Batik Emporium

**Location**  
105 Arab Street

**Established**  
1965

**Business Type**  
Textile

Browsing the colourful array of products lining the shelves of Batik Emporium, you will notice the glistening diamond symbol framed by a decorative border on some of the packaging—the logo of Mr V. S. A. Omar's home-grown *batik* brand.

While Batik Emporium was officially founded in 1965, the family's involvement in the *batik* business began earlier when Mr Omar's father moved from Chennai to Singapore in search of better prospects. He learnt about the *batik* industry through working for Arab merchants after World War II and eventually started his own business.

Growing up alongside the business, Mr Omar has witnessed its evolution from solely selling *batik* fabric, to offering a range of accessories, apparel, and bedding. He also saw the various challenges faced by the business in its early years during the Konfrontasi to losing an entire shipment of goods. The brand's diamond logo is symbolic of its endurance through difficult times.

Mr Omar continues to be actively involved and speaks proudly of his family business, "Because my father was the one who created this, named it Batik Emporium, and registered it in Singapore, I'm very proud of that, as I can say this is a Singapore brand."



## Bhai Sarbat

<b>Location</b>	<b>Established</b>	<b>Business Type</b>
21 Baghdad Street	1950s, Physical store in 1977	Food & Beverage

From the traditional all-time favourite *teh tarik* to the innovative Nescafé Godzilla, patrons can choose from a wide array of 125 drinks at Bhai Sarbat. This cosy drink stall is currently run by Mr Mohammad Asgar. Using a classic preparation technique known as *tarik* (pulling the tea), Mr Asgar effortlessly pours tea from a height to bring out its flavour.

Starting out in the 1950s as a rickshaw food cart, Bhai Sarbat spent its early years roaming the streets to sell tea. Founded by Mr Kabiruddin and Mr Zamir Ahmad, the drink stall eventually acquired a physical shop space in 1977. Customers would refer to the shop as the “Bhai Sarbat stall.” *Bhai*, meaning “brother” in Urdu, was a term of endearment for the two shop owners, and *sarbat* referred to the store’s trademark drink: *teh sarabat*, a milk tea traditionally prepared with ginger extract.

Having worked with Mr Kabiruddin for a decade, Mr Asgar eventually took over the shop and is always concocting new drinks. Bhai Sarbat is Mr Asgar’s *rezeki*, which means sustenance or blessings in Malay. Bhai Sarbat has granted Mr Asgar countless opportunities, and he is grateful that the business has provided for him through thick and thin.

## Blanco Court Prawn Mee 白蘭閣街大蝦麵

<b>Location</b>	<b>Established</b>	<b>Business Type</b>
243 Beach Road	1928	Food & Beverage

From tourists to office workers, patrons from all walks of life can be found slurping prawn noodles with gusto at Blanco Court Prawn Mee. The menu is simple, offering a few variations of prawn noodles—one can add pork ribs to enrich the taste, or opt for the larger jumbo prawns.

The founder Mr Lee Pi Duan migrated to Singapore from Nan’An, Fujian, China in 1928. He decided to sell prawn noodles as a street hawker. With the help of a friend from Xiamen, he tweaked his recipe and the prawn noodles became popular. Mr Lee subsequently moved to a coffee shop in the vicinity of Blanco Court in 1936, which gave the business its name. In 1978, the restaurant relocated to its present-day location at Beach Road.

Fourth-generation owner Mr Chen Kwan (CK) grew up in Kampong Gelam and picked up the trade from his parents. Since taking over the business, CK wakes up at the wee hours of 4:30am to prepare the broth and works tirelessly until 4pm. Throughout the years, the core of Blanco Court Prawn Mee remains the same. “We try to maintain. We try to keep it as authentic as possible,” CK says.





## Bobby Fabrics

<b>Location</b>	<b>Established</b>	<b>Business Type</b>
57 Arab Street	1980s	Textile

Specialising in Thai and raw silk, Bobby Fabrics works closely with manufacturers in India and Thailand to create a diverse array of textiles with unique colour combinations. The business was established in the 1980s by Mr Swarant Singh, known affectionately as Bobby. It was an avenue for him to implement his ideas for new products and designs. Decades later, Jagjit, also known as Jacky, has taken over his father's business, and adopts the same innovative spirit.

Under Jacky's care, Bobby Fabrics now sells widely to a global clientele that includes royalty from Malaysia and Brunei, top designers from Southeast Asia, as well as customers from the United Arab Emirates and Hungary. Jacky is not concerned about going digital as customers need to feel and see the colours of the silk in-person. Purchasing fabrics is a unique experience that e-commerce simply cannot replace.

Jacky has fond memories of Kampong Gelam, including the days when containers used to come to the neighbourhood to offload fabrics. "It was so busy; it was like the Port of Singapore Authority." Nonetheless, he adopts a laissez-faire attitude to the ever-changing times and is happy to go with the flow. "We just hope we are healthy enough, really."

## C.P. Ghariwala

<b>Location</b>	<b>Established</b>	<b>Business Type</b>
36 Bussorah Street	1939	Muslim prayer mats (sejadah), shawls and souvenirs

*C.P. Ghariwala has ceased operations as of 31 July 2022.*

Among products like souvenirs and shawls, C.P. Ghariwala was known for its high-quality Muslim prayer mats (*sejadah*). The shop's history traces from Singapore back to third-generation owner Mr Paresh Ghariwala's family roots in Gujarat, India.

In 1953, Mr Paresh's late granduncle—Mr Chandulal Tulsidas Ghariwala came to Singapore on the advice of his relatives, where he established his textile wholesale business, C.P. Ghariwala. When the business was starting to take off, Mr Paresh's late father, Mr Rameshchandra Chhotalal Ghariwala, came to Singapore to help with the business when he was sixteen. It was then that the business pivoted to focus on carpets and became an early mover in importing prayer mats into Singapore.

The shop was succeeded by Mr Paresh and his brother, Mr Pankaj. The ceasing of the shop's operations in July 2022 was a sentimental moment for them. Leading up to this, they were considering whether to stop the business; Mr Pankaj's heart attack was simply the catalyst for the final decision.

Mr Paresh will always treasure the memories of the different people and stories he encountered, and he hopes that they will be remembered for their dedication to their customers and friends.





## Digvijay Sequins

**Location**  
89 Arab Street

**Established** 2005  
**Business Type**  
Haberdashery

With crystal beads, lace trims and curious accessories dangling like chandeliers, Digvijay Sequins is a kaleidoscope of colours, shapes, and textures. While Digvijay Sequins was established in 2005, its origins can be traced back to the business started by Mr Harish Kumar's grandfather in Northern India. He brought the business over when he moved to Singapore with the family in the 1930s. Since then, it has made a home for itself at Arab Street selling products like beads, sequins, and trimmings.

Although the wide range of haberdashery items help to attract customers, what keeps them coming back is the dedicated service provided by Mr Kumar and his family. They will offer customers examples of designs, choices of materials, and advice on how to match things. Even though they have started an online platform, Mr Kumar believes his products and services are best appreciated in person.

Having grown up in Kampong Gelam since the 1960s, Mr Kumar feels strongly about the precinct. "This is the only place that I know I can do my business, and I also like the area. You know, it's different from any other place. It has no modern buildings and all that. This is nice, comfortable."



## Frangipani Wellness Spa

**Location**  
73 Aliwal Street

**Established** 2006  
**Business Type**  
Spa

Frangipani Wellness Spa provides traditional Javanese massage therapy that uses home-made herbal and healing oils. Its founder, Mr Moe Salem, developed a passion for meditation and healing during his extensive travels in the 1970s. It was in Indonesia where he met local elderly folks who taught him about the Javanese tradition of wellness.

At Frangipani, their massages follow traditional methods with the use of home-made herbal and healing oils. For instance, the frangipani oil made from the namesake flower has strong antioxidant and anti-inflammatory traits. The recipe for the oil is Moe's trade secret, and not offered anywhere else in Singapore. The spa also makes its own *jamu*, a tonic drink with medicinal properties made from natural ingredients such as herbs, flowers, roots and spices.

Moe takes great pride in Kampong Gelam's cultural heritage and hopes to run the spa in the precinct for as long as possible. "You know we have the Istana (Malay Heritage Centre). We have the mosque. And we have the old shophouses here which used to be owned by the Bugis, by the Javanese, the Indian Muslims, the Arabs. They were all here. So, the history is here. This is the place."



## Habib Crafts Pte Ltd

**Location**  
44 Bussorah Street

**Established**  
1940s-1950s

**Business Type**  
Basketry and  
leather products

At Habib Crafts, one can find a wide array of products, from rattan straw bags to classic board games. There is a nostalgic feel to the shop, synonymous with that of the Kampong Gelam heritage district. Just as how the interior of the shop runs deep, so does Habib Crafts' own history.

According to third-generation owner Ms Sabiamma D/O Anwardeen, the business began in the 1940s-1950s with her grandfather. It was initially named Habib Leather and Crafts as they primarily sold leather products and baskets. Over time, the business diversified its offerings to include general merchandise, such as children's toys and umbrellas. One product that has been a perennial seller through the decades is the *sepak takraw* ball. While other rattan products have declined in popularity, the *sepak takraw* ball has continued to hold its own since the 1960s, keeping a traditional sport alive for kids of today.

To Ms Sabia, the continuity of heritage businesses like hers in Kampong Gelam is important. For the young, knowing where they came from is just as important as looking towards the future. She strongly believes that if the younger generation supports these longstanding businesses, they will survive and bloom again.



## Haji V Syed Abu Thahir Trading

**Location**  
718 North Bridge Road

**Established**  
1987

**Business Type**  
Pilgrimage Products

For nearly a century, Haji V Syed Abu Thahir Trading has been selling pilgrimage products, as well as natural products like dates, honey, and oil-based perfumes.

Mr Mohammed Sharifshabibullah, also known as Mr Sabiyuallah or Mr Safi, is one of the third-generation owners. His business partner is the great-grandson of the founder, who established the original business in 1924. The business was subsequently partitioned into two shops, which led to Thahir Trading registering its official year of establishment as 1987.

Thahir Trading has established itself as a reliable source for Muslims to acquire items for their pilgrimages to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The shop sells white garments worn during the pilgrimages that are commonly known as *Ihram* clothing, along with the belt specially made to hold the clothing together. There are also medicated oils that relieve ailments sustained from the physically demanding rituals.

Running this business is meaningful to Mr Safi as it is deeply rooted in culture. "And also, this shop is near to the mosque, so people who just finished their prayers will feel happy, satisfied with the pilgrimage goods. I am very happy, because I am selling very, very pure things—not mixed with any kind of bad things."



## Halijah Travels Pte Ltd

**Location**  
22 Kandahar Street

**Established**  
1991

**Business Type**  
Travel agency

Halijah Travels was established in the 1980s by Ms Halijah, the late sister of the current owner Mr Haffidz Abdul Hamid. Ms Halijah saw an opportunity to offer a unique travel service for pilgrims performing the Hajj, a service that was not readily available in Singapore back then.

Today, up to 70% of their business is related to the Umrah (minor pilgrimage) and the Hajj (main pilgrimage and one of the pillars of Islam), with the remaining catering to general tours to different parts of the world. Halijah Travels also organises classes related to the Hajj and Umrah in English for non-Malay speaking Muslims.

Originally located in the Golden Landmark Shopping Centre, Halijah Travels moved to Kandahar Street in 2001. Mr Haffidz says Kampong Gelam was chosen for its historical and religious significance. Between the late 19th century and the 1970s, Muslim pilgrims would gather at Kampong Gelam before they set off for the Hajj in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

After more than 25 years in the trade, Haffidz enjoys being a travel agent and working in Kampong Gelam, “As far as heritage is concerned, this is where it is—the religious and cultural heart of the Malay world in Singapore.”

## Hjh Maimunah Restaurant and Catering

**Location**  
11 Jalan Pisang

**Established**  
1990s

**Business Type**  
Food & Beverage

Named after the founder’s mother, Hj Maimunah has been serving traditional kampong-style Malay cuisine since the 1990s. Today, it is run by second-generation owner Ms Mastura Binte Didih Ibrahim and her sisters, Ms Maria and Ms Maryam.

Growing up, Mastura spent almost all her school holidays helping her mother at the restaurant. After completing her studies in food technology, Mastura joined the business full-time. She improved the process of sourcing ingredients by searching for suppliers who could deliver fresh ingredients. She also oversees the central kitchen, which produces pastes and sauces used in their restaurants and stalls today. Popular offerings include *lodeh* (a coconut-based vegetable dish) and *ayam masak merah* (chicken in spicy tomato sauce).

Mastura hopes to keep the Jalan Pisang restaurant going for as long as she can. It has a special place in her heart because it holds many nostalgic memories for her and her customers. Furthermore, for some customers, it is their first taste of Malay food. “I feel a sense of responsibility to still make this kind of food accessible to our customers,” says Mastura. She hopes to educate the younger generation about traditional Malay cuisine and keep this tradition alive.





## Honly Company 豐利魚網私人有限公司

<b>Location</b> 335 Beach Road	<b>Established</b> 1970	<b>Business Type</b> Nets, ropes, and marine accessories
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Honly Company, a store which sells nets, ropes, and marine accessories, has a long history in Kampong Gelam which dates to 1970. It started out as a trading company that focused on fishing nets and ropes. At that time, Beach Road was close to the sea, making it the perfect spot for Honly to sell its fishing products.

Today, the sea is further away from Beach Road after years of land reclamation. Stores like Honly, along with the road's name, are the remaining traces of Kampong Gelam's association with the sea.

Mr Derrick Khoo, the second-generation co-owner, has grown up with Honly and watched his father run the business. After taking over, Honly has expanded and diversified its products beyond fishing nets and ropes—it now sells safety nets, lifebuoys and mooring ropes which are exported to emerging markets in Africa and countries in the Indian Ocean. Honly has also ventured into the food industry to sell *surimi*, also known as fish paste.

Though Kampong Gelam has changed over the years, the precinct remains special to Mr Khoo. He loves the “*kampung* feel” where “there’s trust, and friendship among the neighbours”, believing that it cannot be replicated anywhere else.

## Jamal Kazura Aromatics

<b>Location</b> 728 North Bridge Road, 21 Bussorah Street, 39 Bussorah Street	<b>Established</b> 1933	<b>Business Type</b> Perfumery and Aromatics
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Founded by Mr Hanifa Kazura in 1933, the family business started out as a general trade store known as Kazura Company. When Mr Hanifa’s son, Mr Jamal Kazura, took over the business in the late 1970s, he decided that the business should specialise in perfumery. Rebranding the business as Jamal Kazura Aromatics, Mr Jamal focused on the sale of *minyak attar*, a non-alcoholic, oil-based perfume that is usually extracted from plants and the production of unique in-house blends.

Today, the business is run by Mr Samir Kazura. He learnt the tricks of the trade from his father, Mr Jamal, who put different combinations of scents on him to test how it would smell on the skin. This gave Mr Samir the title of “perfume kid” as he would go to school wearing the fragrances from the shop.

As the third-generation owner, Mr Samir is actively finding ways to modernise the business while retaining its authenticity. He also cares deeply about ensuring the quality and sustainability of natural ingredients like agarwood. With his enterprising spirit and passion, Jamal Kazura Aromatics is in good hands and will keep going strong even as it approaches its ninth decade.





## Joe Fishing Tackle

**Location**  
331 Beach Road

**Established** 1996  
**Business Type**  
Fishing equipment

Joe Fishing Tackle was started in 1996 by Mr Joe Ng Soo Sim. Originally located at Arab Street, the shop moved to its present-day location at Beach Road three years later. At that time, Beach Road was a hub for fishing enthusiasts. It was Mr Joe's passion for recreational fishing which pushed him to leave his job at an auto shop to start the business. From hooks to baits, Joe Fishing Tackle has everything you need for a weekend fishing trip.

But running a business serving fishing hobbyists is not easy. With the rise of e-commerce, customers are gravitating towards online shopping. These online businesses are spared from the high rental costs and staffing issues. It is also increasingly difficult to keep up with newer and better models constantly entering the market.

Regardless of what happens in the future, what ultimately started Joe Fishing Tackle and what will remain long after, is Mr Joe's love for the sport: "For me, I just want to go out to the sea, set my anchor, I don't care if there's fishes or not, I'll just on my music, bring out the alcohol, and just relax. Got fish or not that's okay, no worries."



## Kampong Glam Cafe

**Location**  
17 Bussorah Street

**Established** 2004  
**Business Type**  
Food & Beverage

Founded in 2004 by Mr Bashir Khan and his late uncle, Mr Abdul Rahim bin Musa, Kampong Glam Cafe serves home-cooked Malay dishes and drinks. It occupies what used to be an electrical shop called Kampong Glam Radio, whose logo was adapted to form the red and white signboard that dons the storefront today.

Prior to running this business, Mr Bashir was a professional football player in the 1990s, playing for the national team and local clubs. His connections to the Singapore football scene have brought many fellow footballers to the cafe.

The menu offers local favourites such as *mee siam*, *mee rebus*, and *nasi lemak*. Alternatively, customers can opt for *nasi padang* or *makan dulang*, a spread of dishes served on a large tray which is perfect for a family meal.

All the dishes are original recipes of Mr Bashir's aunt, who has worked there as a chef since its opening. His brother comes in the evenings to take care of the duties until closing time, while his children help when they need extra hands. It may not be easy work, but Mr Bashir treasures the fact that he is able to work with his family members every day.

## Kebaya by Ratianah

### Location

23 Bussorah Street

### Established

2006

### Business Type

Fashion

Mdm Ratianah Binte Mohd Tahir is committed to honouring her heritage and roots. Her retail business, Kebaya by Ratianah, specialises in making traditional Malay garments such as *kebaya* and *baju kurung*.

The business first opened its doors at Bali Lane and later moved to its current location along Bussorah Street. Ratianah chose Kampong Gelam due to its historical significance to the Malay community and access to beautiful textiles and fabrics at Arab Street.

Ratianah is known for her ability to transform a simple piece of fabric into a nice design that flatters her customer's silhouette and meets their preferences. She always includes traditional details that honour and make the *kebaya* and *baju kurung* unique. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she successfully adapted her business by making and selling *batik* face masks.

Above all, what is most gratifying for Ratianah is seeing how her customers return and pass their love for *baju* to their children. Daughters who came with their mothers, and for whom she made *bajus* when they were little, have now grown up and become her customers too. Kebaya by Ratianah has succeeded in becoming part of the district's rich, vibrant culture, and one can trust Ratianah to sustain her legacy.



## KH Plastics

### 佳合塑膠

### Location

132 Arab Street

### Established

1976

### Business Type

Plasticware

The storefront of KH Plastics is unassuming and utilitarian, jam-packed with an assortment of plastic products, from postal courier bags to food packaging products. Amidst the vast array of products, third-generation owner Mr Seah Yang Phing is always happy to help customers find their desired product.

KH Plastics started out at Blanco Court in 1976. In the late 1980s, it moved to Arab Street when Blanco Court was redeveloped. At that time, Mr Seah had taken over the business from his uncle and was managing it with his mother and younger sister.

Over the decades, KH Plastics has established its footing in Kampong Gelam. They are recognised by fellow shopkeepers as a reliable source for their plastic packaging needs. The business also keeps up with trends in the food packaging industry. However, not every trend is easy to accommodate. The move towards paper products puts KH Plastics in a difficult spot as it means having to source for new suppliers and inject new funds.

With going green being the global trend, Mr Seah looks to the future with a pragmatic attitude. He is content to keep to his existing customer base and serve them for as long as he can.



## Kiah's Gallery

**Location**  
71 Sultan Gate

**Established**  
2011

**Business Type**  
Textile

Named after her mother, Kiah's Gallery was founded by Mdm Yati Hairi in 2011. Having always loved *batik*, this business began from Mdm Yati's desire to promote *batik* as a piece of everyday clothing.

Located at Sultan Gate, the shop is a boutique for custom, handmade *batik* design and it also doubles up as a *batik* art gallery. Each *batik* piece is meticulously handmade by Mdm Yati, the sole tailor and designer of the business. Mdm Yati puts a creative spin on her customised *batik* designs, weaving in other influences such as Chinese, Indian, and Japanese styles. Her best creations include *cheongsams* and *kimonos* adorned with *batik* pattern.

Kampong Gelam, which is described as an "art village" by Mdm Yati, is precisely where Kiah's Gallery is meant to be. It carries a charm of its own, with its beautiful *batik* designs, warm shop owners, and its resident cat—Kopi. Mdm Yati loves having visitors, regardless of whether they come to coo at her cat or to ask about her *batik* designs. Nothing gives Mdm Yati more pleasure than when visitors leave her store with a newfound appreciation for *batik*.

## Kin Soon Pte Ltd - House of Ribbons 欽順私人有限公司

**Location**  
36 Arab Street

**Established**  
1975

**Business Type**  
Haberdashery

Kin Soon specialises in ribbons and custom ribbon printing. Founded in 1975 by Mr Seah Seow Hor, the business is currently run by his daughters, Ms Terina Seah and Ms Tracy Seah. For those familiar with Kampong Gelam's Arab Street, the name might be reminiscent of another store called Kin Lee & Company.

Ms Terina's great-grandfather originally came to Singapore from Swatow (Shantou), a coastal city in Guangdong, China. Here, he settled in Kampong Gelam, setting up a shop called Soon Lee. The shop's name became Kin Lee after her grandfather took over the business. When her father subsequently started his own business, he adapted its name from both shops, forming Kin Soon.

The business started out selling decorative ribbons and exporting products to Malaysia and Indonesia. They even created their own in-house brand, Minton Ribbons, which became reputed for its high-quality satin ribbons. Over the years, Kin Soon has diversified its products to include other types of packaging materials.

Although the next natural step is transitioning online, Ms Terina shares that many of their customers still enjoy the experience of visiting their shop, "because they see so many colours, it feels like a child going into a candy shop."







## Leong Poh Kee 梁波記錶行

<b>Location</b> 289 Beach Road	<b>Established</b> 1931	<b>Business Type</b> Luxury Watch Wholesaler and Retailer
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Leong Poh Kee was started by the granduncle of third-generation owner Mr William Leong, as a watch repair store on Smith Street in Chinatown. William’s granduncle was not a blood relative but hailed from the same village as the Leongs. Later, William’s father began working at the store after he arrived in Singapore from Guangzhou, China. It was where he learnt watch repairing skills. Over time, they shifted to a wholesale business model.

Leong Poh Kee’s business steadily grew, catering to a customer base beyond Singapore. Watches were also sold to sailors from cruise ships that called at Singapore. The sailors bought watches from Leong Poh Kee to sell in the places that their ships subsequently called at, such as Penang and India, reaching as far as South America.

In the 1980s, Leong Poh Kee relocated to Kampong Gelam as the precinct was home to many wholesale businesses at that time. Now helmed by the third and fourth generations of the family, they believe that the key to Leong Poh Kee’s longevity is cherishing familial ties. Every member pulls his or her own weight to help with the business—a family value that has clearly stood the test of time.

## Luk Lu Eating House 陸盧餐室

<b>Location</b> 341 Beach Road	<b>Established</b> 1960s	<b>Business Type</b> Food & Beverage
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Founded in the 1960s by current owner Mr Zhuang’s grandfather, Luk Lu comprises a drinks stall run by the Zhuangs, and food stalls selling local favourites like duck rice, claypot rice, grilled crab, *Hokkien mee*, *char kway teow*, and *wanton mee*. Since its establishment, Luk Lu occupied the same first-floor space of the shophouse at the junction of Aliwal Street and North Bridge Road.

Having operated the business for over three generations, the Zhuangs have witnessed first-hand how the area has changed. Mr Zhuang notes, “Last time, a lot of shops around here sell fishing stuff, *wu jin* (五金, or “hardware shop”).” Luk Lu has become akin to an unmoving island amidst a sea of change, encapsulating the charm of the ordinary and everyday places in Singapore.

“If you are talking about heritage here, I can tell you how old this place is,” says Mr Zhuang, “you look at the floor, you know how old.” To him, tradition is preserved through basic acts like exchanging \$1.50 for a cup of *teh* (tea) or eating at the coffee shop instead of ordering online - acts which take little effort on our part, but mean much more to storeowners like him.



## Mahaco Impex

**Location**  
51 Arab Street

**Established** 1980s  
**Business Type**  
Textile

Mahaco Impex started from the back of a motorbike. That was how founder Mr Maha Singh Sandhu transported and sold netting to florists and bridal shops, before expanding to silk. The business flourished and subsequently moved into the current shophouse at Arab Street where it has been for more than 30 years. Today, the business is known for its beautiful high-quality fabrics, such as Thai silk with Indian embroideries, Chinese brocade, and Irish linen.

Second-generation owner Mr Gurmail Singh has watched Arab Street evolve over the years. When China expanded its textile market around the year 2000, many local textile shops shifted their focus to retail sales. Likewise, Mahaco Impex diversified its offerings to sell readymade clothing and other products such as shawls, pashminas, and bedspreads. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Mr Gurmail tried to boost sales by bringing the business online. However, responses were slow as customers still preferred to feel the actual goods in-person.

Despite the challenging business environment, Mr Gurmail enjoys running Macaho Impex. No matter how the future will unfold, one thing Mr Gurmail knows for sure is that under his watch, he wants Mahaco Impex to become “the best silk shop in Singapore.”



## Mesra Enterprises

**Location**  
724 North Bridge Road

**Established** 1974  
**Business Type**  
Gemstones  
and Jewellery

*Mesra Enterprises has ceased operations as of 1 September 2022.*

Dealing precious and semi-precious stones, Mesra Enterprises was known for its readymade jewellery as well as customisation services. From the outside, it looked like any other nondescript shop along North Bridge Road, but within its glass displays was a treasure trove of precious and semi-precious stones, laid out in all their unique shapes, sizes, and colours.

Founded in 1974 by Mr Osman bin Jabbar, the business was passed onto Mr Maonah after Mr Osman's passing in 2003. Though they were not related by blood, Mr Osman treated Mr Maonah like a brother and welcomed him into the business. For the last two decades, Mr Maonah ran the shop with his wife, Mdm Rohani, until it ceased operations in 2022.

In the past, Mr Osman would travel to different regions in Southeast Asia and even ventured into jungles to mine stones by himself. He drew in many regulars who stayed because of Mr Maonah's skilled craftsmanship. The shop also attracted the interest from the younger generation who sought customised pieces.

Although Mesra Enterprises is now closed, Mr Maonah and Mdm Rohani hope that their business will be remembered for their integrity, warmth, and hospitality.

## Ming Sing Flowers 民生花店私营有限公司

**Location**  
98 Arab Street

**Established**  
1987

**Business Type**  
Artificial Flowers  
and Decorations

Founded in 1975 as a toy shop at Bugis Street, the family business began selling high-quality artificial flowers in 1987. At that time, the shop was in Blanco Court at North Bridge Road (the site of present-day Raffles Hospital). Settling in Arab Street eventually, Ming Sing Flowers prides itself as one of the pioneer wholesale artificial flower sellers in Singapore — one can find decoy versions of almost any breed of flora and fauna that is found in a real flower shop.

Currently helmed by third-generation owner Ms Irene Chua, she has kept up with the times by bringing in a wider range of products such as festive and event decorations. She also frequently changes her display to showcase more contemporary products and styles. Ming Sing Flowers has also started an online platform, even though Irene advises that the shop's hyper-realistic products are best appreciated in person.

Irene treasures the good relationships with her neighbours and clientele she has built up over the years. To show her appreciation for her neighbours who have become her friends, Irene offers an "Arab Street Members' Discount". She values the connections and hopes to stay at Arab Street for as long as she can.



## Nan Hwa Chong Fish-Head Steamboat 南華昌(亞秋)魚頭爐

**Location**  
814 North Bridge Road

**Established**  
1927

**Business Type**  
Food & Beverage

Located in the fringes of Kampong Gelam, where North Bridge Road and Jalan Sultan meet, Nan Hwa Chong Fish-Head Steamboat has been serving traditional fish head steamboat in the precinct for at least twenty years. This eatery has kept its original recipe and cooking method of boiling the steamboat's fish broth over charcoal embers. Even the aluminium steamboat pot has remained the same throughout the years.

In 1927, the founder migrated to Singapore from Swatow (Shantou), China. He subsequently set up a hawker stall selling Teochew fish soup in Wayang Street (Eu Tong Sen Street). His grandson, Ah Chew took over in the 1980s and worked hard to maintain the same quality of the family recipe. In the 2000s, Ah Chew met Mr Lee Hong Chuan, who gave him the support to continue the business. They expanded the dishes on the menu, and the business grew in popularity.

Today, Ah Chew has retired, and the restaurant is helmed by Mr Lee's son, Michael, who endeavours to continue the business for as long as possible. Undoubtedly the warm relationships they have with their customers and each other are fuelled by all of them staying in the same boat all this time.





## Osman Silk House

**Location**  
104 Arab Street

**Established**  
1935

**Business Type**  
Textile

Being in operation for nearly 90 years, Osman Silk House is one of the oldest textile businesses residing in Arab Street today. Mr Mohamed Anis Osmanbhoy, the third-generation owner, continues his grandfather's legacy with a burning passion.

Established by Mr Anis' grandfather in 1935, the business originally started out in the district of Kulim in Kedah, Malaysia. His grandfather moved to Alor Setar and subsequently migrated to Singapore in the mid-1940s. He settled in Kampong Gelam, setting up a main branch in Singapore. Although the shop has moved several times, it has remained within Arab Street.

Osman Silk House used to cater to the wholesale market, selling to retailers in bulk quantities. When trends shifted to favour more expensive fabrics, they adapted and transitioned to a retail business. The shop now supplies exclusive, branded fabrics such as Liberty Fabrics from London and Irish Linen from Ireland.

"It's not like selling ready-made—anybody can sell ready-made but not textiles. You need to sell your feelings, to excite the customers. Or else they get bored and walk away," says Mr Anis. Without a doubt, he loves what he does and is determined to keep the torch burning for Osman Silk House.

## Paramount Traders (S) Pte Ltd

**Location**  
83 Arab Street

**Established**  
1967

**Business Type**  
Textile

Paramount Traders (S) Pte Ltd was founded in 1967 by Mr Anil Chandru Thadani's father, Mr Chandru, after he arrived in Singapore from Japan with his family. The business started from a small office in High Street with inventories stored in public warehouses.

In the late 1980s, second-generation owner Mr Anil went into the semi-wholesale business, selling directly to regional retailers. When China's textile sector began selling directly to consumers at factory prices in the 2000s, Mr Anil changed his strategy. He consolidated his wholesale, semi-wholesale businesses and his inventories under one roof in Kampong Gelam. Mr Anil also expanded into the retail business using the shophouse front to introduce the brand, Liberty Silk House and chose a bold contemporary interior design for the shop.

Despite the challenging business environment, Mr Anil's dedication and passion for the trade have kept the business going. "Fabric is something that you may have knowledge in, but if you don't have the timing, the concept and the clientele, it will not work. It's years and years of work," he says. "It has to be in your DNA. We always joke in our textile industry that we don't have blood, we have fibres in our veins."





## Prince Coffee House 太子咖啡座私人有限公司

**Location**  
249 Beach Road

**Established**  
1977

**Business Type**  
Food & Beverage

From the outside, Prince Coffee House may look like a typical coffee shop, but step inside and you will soon find yourself captivated by the vintage-style posters decorating the walls. The menu promises a taste of the nostalgic past, featuring old-school dishes such as oxtail stew, salmon steak and pork chop. The 80 years old owner, Mr Lim Low Bok, also fondly known as Uncle Jimmy, will be more than happy to share stories about this Hainanese western cuisine restaurant.

Prince Coffee House was established in 1977 at Shaw Tower along Beach Road. The building used to house Prince Cinema—hence giving the restaurant its name. After staying at Shaw Tower for 13 years, they relocated to Coronation Plaza at Bukit Timah Road for the next 22 years. In the 2010s, when the other shareholders retired, Mr Lim took full responsibility of the business. He returned to Beach Road, and Prince Coffee House has remained there ever since.

Over the years, Prince Coffee House has won the hearts of patrons from all walks of life. Apart from its delicious food, what really gives the restaurant its charm is the sincere care and hospitality extended to all their customers.

## Rishi Handicrafts

**Location**  
58 Arab Street

**Established**  
1985

**Business Type**  
Rattanware  
and Baskets

*Rishi Handicrafts has ceased operations as of 30 September 2022.*

Founded in 1985 by Mr Darshan Singh, Rishi Handicrafts was a rattanware shop specialising in handwoven baskets. In the 1950s and 1960s, Singapore was well known for handcrafting baskets, with production concentrated in Kampong Bugis near the Kallang River. By the time that Rishi Handicraft was established, locally produced rattan pieces had dwindled, and Darshan imported rattan baskets from Vietnam, China, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Business continued to be brisk in the 1980s and 1990s. With each piece handwoven and unique, rattan baskets were also a popular souvenir among tourists. Local shoppers would also purchase baskets to carry meat and vegetables when they went to wet markets. When the 2000s came around, rattan baskets serve specific purposes such as for flower baskets in a wedding, or food hampers during festive occasions.

Darshan's straightforward and jovial nature makes it easy for him to strike up conversations with customers and earned him the affection of students. He cherished every opportunity to educate the younger generation on Singapore's history with rattan baskets. To the Kampong Gelam community and the students who were eager to complete their projects, Darshan was the unofficial, friendly rattan teacher, full of stories about the craft.



## Rumah Makan Minang

**Location**  
18 Kandahar Street

**Established** 1954  
**Business Type**  
Food & Beverage

Having grown up in Kampong Gelam in the 1980s, Mr Hazmi Zin remembers how his grandmother Hajjah Rosemah would cook Minangkabau dishes for diners in her own home: “You can see all the Arab traders coming in, Indonesian traders as well, they would come to my grandma’s place for food.”

Hazmi’s mother, Mdm Zulbaidah Marlian is the youngest daughter of Haji Marlian Athar and Hajjah Rosemah Mailu. They founded Sabar Menanti, one of the most well-known *nasi padang* shops in Singapore. Following in their footsteps, Mdm Zulbaidah started Rumah Makan Minang with her husband Mr Zin Harun. Today, it is run by Hazmi, who has steered it through some tough times such as the 2003 SARS outbreak and COVID-19 pandemic.

Rumah Makan Minang has persevered through the challenges and emerged with a brand that the family is proud of. To uphold the family legacy, Hazmi collaborates with other restaurants such as Shangri-La Hotel’s The Line Restaurant to supply *rendang* and *balado*. “I want to be remembered for my food and heritage,” says Hazmi. “The journey that we went through to bring up the branding was not easy, so I always tell my staff to take care of the name and treat our customers well.”



## Sabar Menanti

**Location**  
737 North Bridge Road

**Established** 1920  
**Business Type**  
Food & Beverage

Sabar Menanti, which means “to wait patiently” in Malay, was started by Haji Marlian Athar and Hajjah Rosemah Mailu. The restaurant’s cuisine has its roots in Minang, West Sumatra, Indonesia. Beginning as a pushcart business in the 1920s, Sabar Menanti grew into a modest restaurant on Kandahar Street. Over the years, the restaurant perfected its *nasi padang* recipe to create a classic, distinctive taste that locals love.

In 2022, Mr Iszhar Tambunan took over the restaurant from his mother. His mother, Mdm Maryulis Bagindor Marlian is the eldest daughter of the founders. As the third-generation owner of the restaurant, Iszhar hopes to carry on its legacy by refreshing Sabar Menanti’s image and expanding the business to more places in Singapore.

Having grown up in Kampong Gelam, Iszhar holds the district and the heritage of Sabar Menanti dear to his heart. When he was growing up, his mother brought him to the shop to help sweep the floor, do the catering, and go to the market with her. Today, his own children are helping at the restaurant. “Hopefully, my kids can be the fourth-generation owners of Sabar Menanti one day.”

## Sifr Aromatics

**Location**  
42 Arab Street

**Established** 2010  
**Business Type**  
Perfumery  
and Aromatics

Sifr Aromatics may seem small when one first glances the unit from the outside. However, stepping through the doors reveals a trendy curated boutique surrounded by wooden shelves filled with scented candles and perfume bottles, complete with a golden piano as a spatial anchor. The interior design reflects the shop's desire to blend the traditional craft of perfumery with a modern approach to scents.

The shop sells a variety of products from perfume oils, soy-wax candles, essential oil blends to customised fragrances. It is run by Mr Johari Kazura, whose grandfather, Mr Hanifa Kazura, founded Kazura Company.

Coming from a family of perfumers, Johari grew up experimenting with the techniques of distilling and extracting scents. He watched his father run Jamal Kazura Aromatics and helped with the family business for twenty over years. In 2010, after having spent time in the United States and France, Johari was inspired to start his own shop to explore new ingredients, techniques, and products.

Today, Sifr Aromatics is featured in various blogs, travel guides and tours. Johari plans to keep creating new scents and is always happy to share his knowledge on aromatics to customers who appreciate the craft.



## Sin Hin Chuan Kee 新興泉記有限公司

**Location**  
798 North Bridge Road

**Established** 1960s  
**Business Type**  
Haberdashery

Founded by Mr Ng Koon Teng in the 1960s, Sin Hin Chuan Kee is a sewing and garment accessories shop. During its heyday in the 1970s to 1990s, many foreign buyers would come to the shop and stock up on goods. They also had many walk-in customers, such as *getai* performers that would purchase materials for their custom-made costumes.

For third-generation owner Mr Kenny Ng, choosing Sin Hin Chuan Kee as his career was a straightforward decision. He grew up spending much of his time in the store and running the business has always been a family affair. Today, he manages the shop with his brother, parents, uncles, and aunts.

Over the years, the business has expanded its products and services. In 2005, they started offering customised ribbon printing, a service pioneered by Kenny. This has now become one of Sin Hin Chuan Kee's main services.

Kenny considers the staff as the bedrock of the business and takes immense pride in the zero-turnover rate. For him, a family business is about maintaining close familial ties with each other. The business is the result of everyone's collective efforts to build a legacy—the thread that binds the family together.





## Teng Joo Textiles 鼎裕貿易私人有限公司

**Location**  
102 Arab Street

**Established**  
1966

**Business Type**  
Textile

Teng, or 鼎, means cauldron, which implies solidity; and Joo, or 裕, means wealth. The company's name thus spells out the aspirations of the family. Ms Alice Teo, daughter of founder Mr Teo Hock Joo, continues to hold on to the family legacy. After 26 years in the family business, she counts product knowledge and interaction skills with customers among the essential requisites to do well.

Founded in 1966, Teng Joo moved to its current location at Arab Street in the early 1990s. As second-generation owner, Alice has helped the business tide through various challenges. While the business started out as a brick-and-mortar store, it has evolved with the times. In addition to serving walk-in customers, Teng Joo now sells fabric to hotels, restaurants, and wedding planners for their events. They have also listed their products on e-commerce platforms to reach a wider customer base. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Alice adapted yet again, supplying fabric to be used as drapes for hundreds of isolation cubicles in worker dormitories.

To Alice, a business means something special once one puts his or her heart into it. It is not just about dollars and cents, and even customers can become friends.

## Thahirah Kazura Pte Ltd

**Location**  
705 North Bridge Road

**Established**  
1933

**Business Type**  
Perfumery and Aromatics

Thahirah Kazura specialises in *attar* (perfume), non-alcoholic fragrances, and medicated oil. Permeating the air is a plethora of scents, from the sweet fragrance of flowers to the sharp smell of peppermint. The shop is managed by Ms Thahirah Kazura, an early childhood educator who took over the business from her father in 2020.

The business traces its lineage to Kazura Company, which was established by Ms Thahirah's grandfather, Mr Hanifa Kazura in 1933. Ms Thahirah's father, Mr Mohamed Nazran started the current business in 1979 and named it Kazura Industries Private Limited. When Ms Thahirah took over the business, she rebranded the shop after her name. With the assistance of her mother, her husband, and her business partner, Mr Hayder Al-Gharbawi, she turned the business from wholesale to retail. She is focusing her efforts in reaching a wider audience—specifically the younger generation and customers beyond the Muslim community.

Regardless of how the business will evolve, Ms Thahirah wants the business to be remembered for its unique scents and smells. She hopes that the shop's fragrances will bring happy memories for her users, filling them with nostalgia whenever they get a whiff of a familiar fragrance.





## The Heritage Shop

**Location**  
93 Jalan Sultan

**Established**  
Early 1990s

**Business Type**  
Antiques  
and Collectibles

Sitting in a pocket of Jalan Sultan is a treasure chest left ajar, waiting to catch the eye of a curious passer-by. Inside, a variety of antiques sit quietly in corners and shelves, waiting for their stories to be uncovered.

In the centre of this trove is Mr Patrick Phoa, founder of The Heritage Shop. Collecting was always a passion for him; he recalls going to Sungei Road during his National Service days, keeping his eyes peeled for potential collectables. His collection started with childhood toys, but over time it extended to valuable collectables of Singapore's past, including old Sinalco advertisements and floral tiffins. As his collection grew, he decided to turn his hobby into a business. The Heritage Shop had relocated five to six times before it finally found a permanent home in Kampong Gelam.

Mr Phoa believes that the value of things depends on one's memories and connection with them. He treasures his collecting journey and hopes that young people will be inspired to experience the same joy in collecting. Going from shop to shop, travelling to remote locations and manoeuvring through precariously stacked objects just to discover that one precious treasure—to him, that feeling is priceless.

## Toko Aljunied

معروض الجنيد

**Location**  
91 Arab Street

**Established**  
1940

**Business Type**  
Textile

Toko Aljunied is a textile business that sells *batik* and traditional clothes such as *sarong kebaya*. Although the business was officially established by Mr Syed Haroon bin Hassan Aljunied in 1940, the shop has been around since the 1930s. First located at 737 North Bridge Road—just opposite the Sultan Mosque—the shophouse was both the premises of the business and the family home. The founder's granddaughter, Ms Zahra Aljunied was born in that shophouse. She currently helps to run the business which belongs to her father, Mr Syed Junied Aljunied.

Toko Aljunied started by selling non-alcoholic perfumes, *batik sarong* and *batik lepas*, as well as *kain pulikat*, a traditional Malay garment that men wear around the waist. Today, Toko Aljunied has diversified its products, selling finely embroidered *Nyonya kebaya* and souvenirs made from *batik* materials. Their men's *batik* shirts are the favourites of many ministers and foreign dignitaries. More recently, the shop started selling pure *Hadrami Sidr* honey originating from Yemen.

With over 80 years of experience in the textile business, Ms Zahra hopes that customers will always remember and come to Toko Aljunied whenever they wish to purchase *Nyonya kebayas* and all things *batik*.



## Town Clinic 小坡藥房

**Location**  
287 Beach Road

**Established** 1963  
**Business Type**  
Medical Clinic

Dr Khoo Boo Yee started Town Clinic when he was 34 years old and believes that “the art of medicine is about relationships with people”. It is this philosophy that has formed the basis of his approach throughout the years. To make his patients feel comfortable, he would speak to them in their preferred language. He would relay his diagnosis in Hokkien to the older Chinese residents and even learnt Bahasa Melayu for his Malay patients. He values personal relationships, striking up genuine connections with Kampong Gelam residents.

Today, Dr Khoo is 93 years old and has retired for more than 15 years, leaving the clinic under the care of his daughter, Dr Christine Khoo. Over the years, seeing and treating patients remain the most rewarding parts of their work. When they alleviate ailments or provide their patients with timely treatment, this is when they feel that their hard work has paid off in ensuring the community’s welfare.

Town Clinic may not be the conventional cultural icon or tourist hotspot, but it is an integral part of the Kampong Gelam. Likewise, Kampong Gelam will always be cherished by the Khoos and they are committed to serving the community.



## V. S. S. Varusai Mohamed & Sons

**Location**  
721 North Bridge Road

**Established** 1924  
**Business Type**  
Pilgrimage  
Products

V. S. S. Varusai Mohamed & Sons is a family-run business selling Muslim pilgrimage necessities such as ceremonial dresses, perfume oils, and *tasbeih* (prayer beads). Second-generation owner Mr Haji V. Syed Mohamed now runs the business together with his daughter, Ms Fauzia Rani.

Mr Mohamed’s father originally brought his socks and textiles business from Myanmar (then known as Burma) to Singapore, setting up shop in Kampong Gelam. It was after doing his own Hajj pilgrimage that Mr Mohamed’s father decided to rebrand the business into a one-stop-shop selling everything from *attar*, which are natural perfume oils, to *ihram*, the ceremonial clothing worn on pilgrimages. The fact that it is the only brand in Singapore to have a patented Hajj belt is evidence of its reputation.

As a heritage business that has been running for nearly 100 years, Ms Fauzia hopes that their resilience can inspire other business owners out there: “I just hope that people who run family businesses will not give up easily. It takes a lot of grit and strength to run a family business... to all those youngsters and those aspiring to take over their family businesses, keep going for it, one day, you’ll surely make it.”

# Victory Restaurant

**Location**  
701 North Bridge Road

**Established**  
1910

**Business Type**  
Food and Beverage

Victory Restaurant is an example in which the food truly lives up to a restaurant's name. As one of Singapore's oldest *murtabak* restaurants, Victory Restaurant prides itself on its homemade ingredients and recipes. They have regulars from Malaysia who have been crossing borders for the past 20 to 30 years just to eat its signature *murtabak* and *briyani*. An American tourist who ate there in 1974 even came back 45 years later with the memory of its great service and food.

From the *murtabak* dough to the filling, even the spices used in the *briyani* are a special family recipe that has stayed the same for decades. The century-old establishment has been passed down through generations to Mr Gazali Edikilakath, the grandson of the original founder.

Mr Gazali believes that Victory Restaurant has a special place in Kampong Gelam as one of the oldest establishments there and he attributes its longevity to the loyalty of his customers. To him, it is not only a matter of family pride, but the obligation to preserve the flavours, sights, and smells that are ingrained in people's memories.



# Wardah Books

**Location**  
58 Bussorah Street

**Established**  
2002

**Business Type**  
Bookstore

During Singapore's colonial period, 58 Bussorah Street was the home of Chief Kadi Haji Ali. He was a Muslim judge. During pockets of free time between cases, he sold books on Islamic topics such as the Hajj. Today, the shophouse has weathered the changes of Kampong Gelam over the decades, and its legacy lives on in the bookstore that resides in its walls.

Wardah Books is a bookstore which primarily selling Islamic books in English. Mr Ibrahim Tahir started Wardah Books because of the mismatch between the texts that Muslim readers wanted to read, and the English Islamic books available in Singapore. He wanted to make texts readily available for Muslim readers and meet their needs. The Islamic texts he sources cover topics like politics, philosophy, and world events. Lately, he learnt that people are interested in books about mental health, self-improvement, and children's literature, hence he included these categories on the shelves as well.

Running a bookshop is difficult, but even at the business' lowest point, Mr Ibrahim could not bear to give up. He hopes that Wardah Books will be remembered as a place that served the community and contributed to the distinct Islamic character of Kampong Gelam.





## Warong Nasi Pariaman

**Location**  
738 North Bridge Road

**Established**  
1948

**Business Type**  
Food & Beverage

The air of Warong Nasi Pariaman is soaked in the smell of rice, chicken, spices, and more, exciting the taste buds of its diners. Flanking the restaurant are brown signboards, proudly declaring, “We provide authentic *Nasi Padang*”.

Warong Nasi Pariaman was established in 1948 by husband-and-wife duo Mr Isrin bin Ibrahim and Mdm Rosna binte Zainal Abidin. They migrated from Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia, and set up a street stall in Kampong Gelam. The couple brought a piece of home to Singapore through their cooking, specialising in *nasi padang* dishes—a Minangkabau style of steamed rice that is served with an assortment of pre-cooked dishes, such as *beef rendang* (slow-cooked beef) and *ayam bakar* (roasted chicken).

More than 70 years since its founding, the restaurant stays true to its recipes and food preparation methods. The founders’ son, Mr Jumrin shares that they still use a traditional charcoal stove to cook dishes. Every day, he wakes up before dawn and engages in a routine of performing his prayers, preparing the ingredients at the restaurant, and cooking the dishes. The work may be arduous, but Mr Jumrin is committed to preserving the authenticity of *nasi padang* at Warong Nasi Pariaman.



# Credits

## Volunteers

Abbas Khan  
Ahmad Fakhruddin Bin Mohd Fadzuli  
Ahmad Hasif Bin Mohammad Amran  
Alice Chua  
Andy Tan  
Annisa Fajriani  
Clasfe Chua  
Corliss Chong  
Dewi Imelda Wadhwa  
Eastina Tan  
Fairuz Jaafar  
Felicia Mualim  
Fistri Abdul Rahim  
Fuad Johari  
Heng Su Li  
Jacqueline Choo  
Janice Sim  
Jeannie Ng  
Jonathan Goh  
Joshua Tay  
Justin Huang  
Koh Kai Yee  
Laurinda Wee  
Lee Jun Wei  
Liew Yi Ling  
Mas Hidayati Hamzah  
May Hui  
Monalisa Barai  
Muhd Al-Hakim  
Nadim Nazri  
Ng Jun Xiang  
Ng Meng Chong  
Ng Wee Liang  
Noorul Raaha As'art  
Nur Khairiah Ahmad Samson  
Nurfalah Sha'aban  
Phoo Myet Che, Pearl  
Qistina Athirah Binte Mohamed Isa  
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## Featuring 45 establishments

Aik Bee Textile Co.  
Bamadhaj Brothers  
Basharahil Bros Batik  
Batik Emporium  
Bhai Sarbat  
Blanco Court Prawn Mee  
Bobby Fabrics  
C.P. Ghariwala  
Digvijay Sequins  
Frangipani Wellness Spa  
Habib Crafts Pte Ltd  
Haji V Syed Abu Thahir Trading  
Halijah Travels Pte Ltd  
Hjh Maimunah Restaurant and Catering  
Honly Company  
Jamal Kazura Aromatics  
Joe Fishing Tackle  
Kampong Glam Cafe  
Kebaya by Ratianah  
KH Plastics  
Kiah's Gallery  
Kin Soon Pte Ltd  
Leong Poh Kee  
Luk Lu Eating House  
Mahaco Impex  
Mesra Enterprises  
Ming Sing Flowers  
Nan Hwa Chong Fish Head Steamboat  
Osman Silkhouse  
Paramount Traders (S) Pte Ltd  
Prince Coffee House  
Rishi Handicrafts  
Rumah Makan Minang  
Sabar Menanti  
Sifr Aromatics  
Sin Hin Chuan Kee  
Teng Joo Textiles  
Thahirah Kazura Pte Ltd  
The Heritage Shop  
Toko Aljunied  
Town Clinic  
V. S. S. Varusai Mohamed & Sons  
Victory Restaurant  
Wardah Books  
Warong Nasi Pariaman

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