

Certain images are indelibly linked with places, linking the past with the present, weaving the threads of the future into the social and historical fabric. Such a place is Balestier. A treasure trove of cultural and architectural references, Balestier is a compelling blend of old and new. First settled in the 1840s, the area was developed between the 1920s and 1950s when Singapore expanded its city centre eastwards.



MARTA AN ROAD

balestier/jalan besar



GO CHOR TUA PEK KONG TEMPLE





central

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explore

The main thoroughfare of Balestier is the eponymous Balestier Road, a long stretch that winds its way around the base of Balestier Hill from Thomson Road to Moulmein Road. Your first stop should be **Go Chor Tua Pek Kong Temple**, an ornate, red-roofed Hokkien temple built in 1847. Its opera stage built in 1906 is only one of two surviving stages in Singapore. The banyan tree in the small courtyard,

flanked by spirals of incense and brightly-coloured altars, is believed to house benign spirits and the temple medium will, for a small donation, cast her inner eye to view your future.

Along the way, take in the kaleidoscope of lighting shops, the Moshe Safdie-inspired **Balestier Point**, pawnshops and bird-shops. Of particular interest is **Martaban Road**, a row of traditional shophouses which,



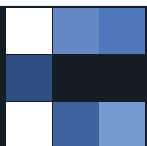
SUN YAT SEN VILLA

while less ornate and built in the 1920s for the upper middle-class looking for a quiet reprieve from the “busy” city life, still mesmerises with its old world charm and pared-down elegance. Further afield at 14 Tai Gin Road is the sprawling **Sasanaramsi Burmese Temple** while next door at No. 12 is **Sun Yat Sen Villa**, a grand stately mansion which used to be the Nanyang headquarters

of Dr Sun Yat Sen and is now open to the public.

It’s a lighting bonanza along Balestier Road with the multiple rows of shops selling all manner of light fittings and chandeliers. There are tin-smiths who will custom-make household furniture as well as a dinky little shop **Lim Kay Khee Optical** (330 Balestier Road) that sells genuine retro spectacle frames from the ’70s.

SASANARAMSI BURMESE TEMPLE



BALESTIER RD

did you know?

At the corner of Boon Teck and Balestier roads is a small kiosk — run by the temple up the road — that dispenses free water: a legacy of days of yore when itinerants and beggars would be given water at the temple gates.

getting there

Buses include nos 21, 124, 125, 130, 131, 139, 145, 186, 603 & 607.

“ I’m glad that even with the modernisation of Singapore, there’ll still always be places like this to relive one’s childhood memories...”

— Amanda Lu, pupil of Nanyang Girls’ High School, on her grandma’s house in Balestier.



eat

Like any old district worth its salt, Balestier is famed for its cuisine. The long stretch of Balestier Road is a thriving haven of every kind of traditional chow ranging from oven-fresh cakes, heavenly *tau sar piah* (there are a few stalls to choose from) and scrumptious *bak chang* at **Eastern Rice Dumplings** (300 Balestier Road) to glistening chicken rice at **Loy Kee Chicken Rice** (342 Balestier Road) and **Hoover Rojak** (Blk 90 Whampoa Drive, #01-641) at Balestier Market. **Kai Juan** (corner of Prome and



Balestier roads) serves some delicious *bak kut teh* you can't resist. Kaya toast fans should visit **Sweetlands Confectionery and Bakery** (10 Kim Keat

Lane) where 1,000 loaves of the traditional black-crusted bread are baked daily.



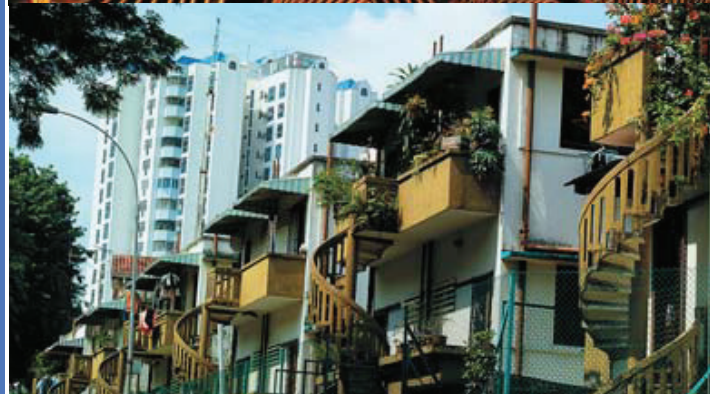
balestier/jalan besar

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what the area could be

One of URA's proposals in the Identity Plan is to conserve the shophouses in the area and spruce up the landscaping at key Balestier Road locations. On the wish-list is an

interim surface carpark to ease parking congestion. Of particular interest is the Balestier Market, built in the 1920s and the only remaining rural market today.



explore

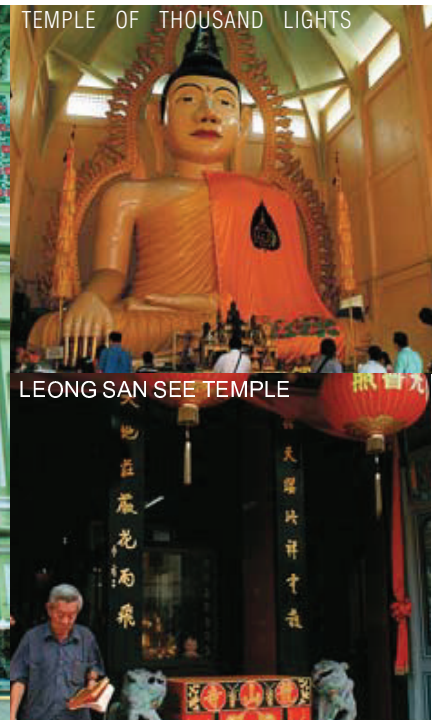
Jalan Besar is an architectural buff's dream come true. Its distinctively baroque street frontages and plasterwork — painted in a robust palette of baby pink, jade and apple green, sky blue, beige and sun yellow — are still distinct, with many fine surviving examples of Singapore eclectic architecture. Each colour has a symbolic value, with green, for example, representing spring, rejuvenation and peace.

The stretch of 18 shophouses along Petain Road is a must-visit. Flanked by a broad tree-lined avenue, the houses are a reminder of a more gracious era. Terracotta finishes and glazed ceramic tiles imported from France, England, Belgium, Spain and Japan frame one of the most ornate facades in Singapore, bursting with



filigreed trees, flowers, cranes and mythical animals.

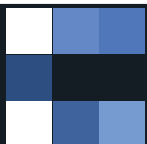
Leading off Jalan Besar is a terrific template of historical sites including Serangoon, Desker, Petain and Syed Alwi Roads. Here, you can just as easily chance upon ancient Chinese



merchants as souped-up rims for your car.

getting there

The closest MRT station is Lavender. A large number of buses pass through including nos 23, 64, 65, 66, 85, 106, 111, 130 & 139.



JALAN BESAR

balestier/jalan besar

what the area could be

One of URA's proposals for Jalan Besar is to conserve the historical street blocks along Serangoon and Lavender roads. Another plan proposes to allow the

ground and upper floors of the shophouses to be used for commercial purposes, hence raising the vibrancy and activity levels in the area.





- 1a 1b 1c Tau Sar Piah stalls
- 2 Sun Yat Sen Villa
- 3 Sasanaramsi Burmese Temple
- 4 Roast Duck
- 5 Car park
- 6 Balestier Market
- 7 Water Kiosk
- 8 Eateries
- 9 Tinsmith
- 10 Conservation homes
- 11 Bird Shop
- 12 Famous Bak Chang stall
- 13a 13b Chinese bakeries
- 14 Whampoa Market
- 15 Go Chor Tua Pek Kong Temple
- 16 Herbal teashops