

Ang Mo Kio

Once a thriving rubber plantation and agricultural farmland, Ang Mo Kio has since been transformed into the quintessential heartland of Singapore - a vibrant neighbourhood filled with an array of malls, small enterprising businesses, local delights and lush greenery.

Home to approximately 150,000 residents, Ang Mo Kio was developed and designed by the Housing Development Board (HDB) as Singapore's seventh satellite town in the 1970s, hovering over 27 hectares of land, comprising of 7 neighbourhoods.

Naming Origins

The origins and theories on how the naming of Ang Mo Kio came about remain plenty. One of the most popular speculations was that Ang Mo Kio was derived from the Hokkien term for Tomatoes. Surprisingly, no tomato farms were ever recorded to grow in the area. This association still lingers till today with various tomato sculptures spotted around the district. Another plausible origin was that the name *Ang Mo Kio* literally translated from Hokkien also meant "Red-hair man bridge," with Ang Mo being Red-Hair Foreigner and Kio being bridge. This origin was in reference to a bridge supposedly built by British Government Surveyor John Turnbull Thomson at the junction of Upper Thomson Road and Ang Mo Kio Avenue 1. Whatever the origins may be – a tomato or a bridge, today Ang Mo Kio remains emblematic and integral to the heartlander lifestyle. Featuring numerous iconic architectures, Ang Mo Kio continues to serve as the blueprint on which many precincts are modelled after.



Tomato Sculptures located at around Ang Mo Kio

Credit: <https://remembersingapore.org/2012/12/12/ang-mo-kio-my-hometown/>
<http://qnoofyem.blogspot.com/2013/06/hello-randoms.html>

Early Beginnings

An initial desolate swampland of impregnable jungles and dense forests, Ang Mo Kio in the early 20th century attracted Hokkien Chinese immigrants who cultivated the land for rubber plantations at the peak of the rubber boom. The decline and slump of rubber prices in the 1920s and 1930s marked the shift towards livestock production and agricultural farming became its key economic production.

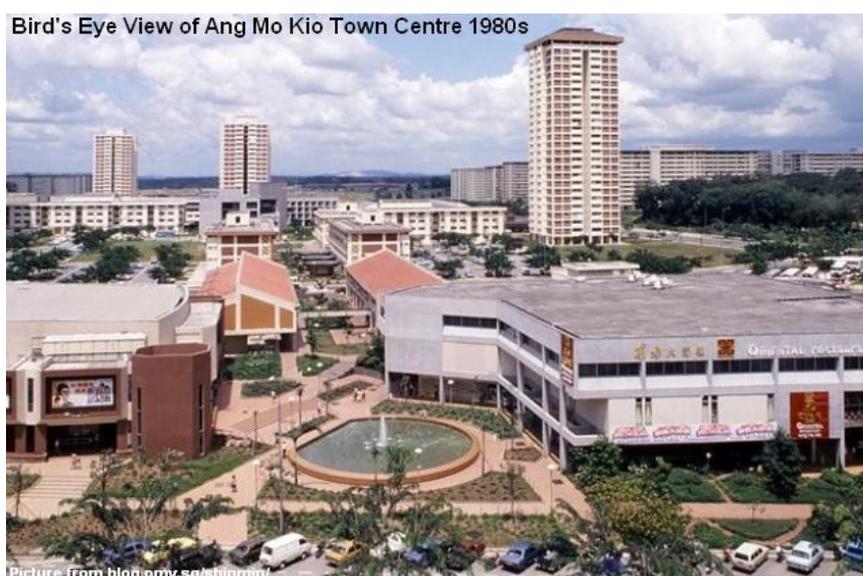
At the onset of the 1970s, the Housing Development Board (HDB) drew up plans to develop and design Ang Mo Kio as Singapore's seventh housing satellite town. Initially developed to be a small relocation workshops for small-time motors, plans expanded to be a full-fledged

housing town. Described by HDB to be a new generation town designed for gracious and community living. (after TPY & Queenstown) Upon its completion, Ang Mo Kio won the esteemed Institute of Architects (SIA) Outstanding Buildings Award in 1983. As of matter of fact, Ang Mo Kio's design and town plan pioneered many 'firsts'. It was the first to utilise a metric dimension. It was also the first to pilot the concept of Town Council in 1986. After some fine-tuning and refinement, the town council model was officially implemented across housing estates in Singapore in 1988.

Uniquely Ang Mo Kio

The town plan of Ang Mo Kio was uniquely and specially designed to be a 'mini city within a city' – an 'All-in-one' neighbourhood where everyday amenities and facilities such as public transportation, shopping malls, food centres, supermarkets, as well as entertainment and educational institutions were all within walking distances and vicinity of residential living. This close proximity – as a self-contained town – facilitated and fostered a strong sense of familial closeness and community spirit.

Epitomising the heart of this 'All-in-one' landscape was the Ang Mo Kio Town Centre. Constructed in 1976, the town centre served as Ang Mo Kio's key community, commercial and entertainment district. One resident likened Ang Mo Kio town centre to a "busy Orchard Road, [albeit] on a smaller scale and without the traffic jams and expensive price tag." Nestled within the town centre was the memorable Oriental Emporium which many yesteryears AMK-ians' have fond memories of their growing-up years. Beyond being a shopping and lifestyle paradise, the VIP Block 710 also holds incredible historic significance where it hosted distinguished guests, where guest could get a bird's eye view of Singapore, including Queen Elizabeth II during her second visit to Singapore. Over the years, Ang Mo Kio Town Centre has undergone numerous renovation and revamping works to cater to the evolving needs of the residents. Today, Ang Mo Kio Town Centre continues to be a bustling commercial, cultural and community hub boasting a newly revamped Jubilee Square, Broadway Plaza and even the latest Ditjitsun mall.



Bird's eye view of Ang Mo Kio Town Centre showing Oriental Emporium and Jubilee Square
Credit: <https://remembersingapore.org/2012/12/12/ang-mo-kio-my-hometown/>

Equally known for its numerous iconic and architectural accolades, Ang Mo Kio's unique 25-storey clover shaped HDB located at Blk 259 Avenue 2 (The Clover @ Kebun Bahru) remains

the first and only circular flat in Singapore. The “tetrahedral skylight” swimming complex at Avenue 1 is another distinctive feature to be awarded the 1986 SIA Architectural Award.



View of Block 259 Ang Mo Kio Avenue 2 (also known as The Clover) taken in 2005
Credit: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/housing/not-just-grey-concrete-7-hdb-blocks-with-unusual-designs>



Credit: <https://lionraw.com/2015/04/26/ang-mo-kio-swimming-complex/>

Not forgetting the iconic dragon playground in Singapore accompanying many nostalgic childhood memories. Featuring brown terrazzo tiles, rubber-mat flooring and a mosaic slide, the dragon playground (at AMK avenue 3) has remained a staple playtime feature since its completion in 1978. It is one of the two remaining dragon playground structures in Singapore (the other being located at Toa Payoh Lorong 6). A beloved motif and pastime of many, the dragon playground has been used and revitalised as heritage souvenirs ranging from enamel pins, lifestyle accessories and even a door stopper.



Credit: Naiise Website



*The brown dragon playground at located at Block Ang Mo Kio Avenue 3
Credit: <https://thesmartlocal.com/read/instawalk-recap-ang-mo-kio/>*

Another beloved symbol of Singapore is the merlion. And unknown to many, Ang Mo Kio is also home to a pair of merlions located at the carpark entrance of Ang Mo Kio Avenue 1, Block 216 – 222. Built in 1988 by the Ang Mo Kio residential committee costing \$30,000, today it stands as one of the seven official merlions in Singapore owned by the Singapore Tourism Board.



The merlion 'twins' located at Ang Mo Kio Avenue 1
 Credit: <https://remembersingapore.org/ang-mo-kio-merlions/>

Modern-day heartland Success

Today Ang Mo Kio continues to be experimental and pioneering in their housing designs and residential planning. In 2010, AMK was the first to roll out Three-Generation (3G) flats, built with elderly-friendly facilities to support multi-generation families. Befitting of the lush greenery and parks, Ang Mo Kio rolled out Singapore's first walking and cycling town as part of the government's plan for a car-lite Singapore. In fact, much of AMK's early entrepreneurial roots and businesses continue to remain a key tenant of modern-day Ang Mo Kio success stories. No longer an uninhabited forested swamp, Ang Mo Kio is a thriving mature neighbourhood filled with rich multicultural histories and heritage.

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Other old photos of oriental emporium



Another view of Oriental Emporium

<https://remembersingapore.org/2012/12/12/ang-mo-kio-my-hometown/>



Oriental Palace restaurant located inside Oriental Emporium

<https://remembersingapore.org/2012/12/12/ang-mo-kio-my-hometown/>



Seven-year-old Lim Hong Siang poses with his cousin Amy Lim in front of the Oriental Emporium in Raffles Place, 1967. They are dressed in their brand new clothes for the Chinese New Year celebrations.

<http://www.nlb.gov.sg/biblioasia/2019/08/30/oriental-emporium-the-end-of-an-era/>