

A-Z - Guide to the new National Library

A spanking new tower bordered on three sides by busy roads, the National Library Board's (NLB) new headquarters at Victoria Street looms large amid the backpacker hostels, Housing Board blocks and the two-century-old buildings of North Bridge Road.

Staring up its 16 floors of glass walls, bespectacled bookworms would bestumped - whether the scholarly dust, the bookish stuffiness?

The slick, state-of-the-art facade of the headquarters is a sure sign that some change is afoot at the National Library, a much-loved institution in a country which has a literacy rate of 94 per cent.

This bumper guide – including tips – will tell you what to look out for in the new National Library.

Atmosphere

Nix your images of stuffy libraries where absent-minded academics pore over small print. On all seven storeys of its reference library, there is mood lighting which – get this – changes colour from red to green to blue to cyan and magenta – every 15 minutes. Open-air gardens scattered all over the buildings are also lit by romantic warm light. But no hanky-panky, please.

Blockbuster

This building has a \$203 million price tag, including interior design. That is about a third of what it cost to build the \$600 million Esplanade.



Command centre

No idle chit-chats around the water cooler at this new hub of knowledge. NLB's head honchos have their offices on Level 14 of the building.



Drama mama

You will get more than just theatre scripts here as the National Arts Council's Drama Centre has moved here from Fort Canning. Occupying Levels 3 to 6 are a 614-seat theatre, a 120-seat black box and a long bar on Level 3. The theatre has air-conditioning vents under every seat. But worry not about having a Marilyn Monroe Seven-Year Itch moment – these vents produce a very gentle draft.

Eclectic

The library's climate-controlled Rare Materials Collection on Level 13 is a showcase of antiques, housing its oldest publication, *The History Of Trauayle In The West And East Indies*, from 1577. There is also a letter written by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819. Readers must write to NLB to seek permission to view the rare materials – and handle them gently, with gloved hands.

Freebies

NLB organises free talks and programmes for the public regularly. All in the name of enticing bookworms to drop by more often.

Green

There are 14 gardens in this building, where lush foliage covers a third of its total area. You can curl up in one of its two huge Zen gardens at Levels 5 and 10 and sink your teeth into that great read you just borrowed. Everything here is so eco-friendly that the Building and Construction Authority has awarded the NLB top green honours: the Platinum Award for the Green Mark Scheme.

Happening

If you thought the slick and classy library@esplanade and library@orchard were hip, you have not seen nothing yet. Swop literary gossip with a friend over coffee at Hans cafe. Or just cool your heels while waiting for a poetry recital or mini-concert to begin at one of the many exhibition venues. Plus, there is the gorgeous rooftop Pod, a glass bubble with a 360-degree view. On a clear day, look southwards and you will see Indonesia.



Intergalactic

Wander about the massive, pristine-white structures at the events plaza on the ground floor and feel like an extra in a Star Wars installment. A far cry, certainly, from its red-brick predecessor at Stamford Road which was, sadly, demolished last March after 44 years.

Jumbo

Space, space everywhere. This new 58,000 sq m head-quarters is five times the size of the old one at Stamford Road, or the size of about 600 four-room HDB flats.



K-shaped

If you were flying by in a helicopter, you would see that this building is actually K-shaped from the top - thanks to two main blocks connected by covered walkways. The larger library block houses the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library. The curved second block, which houses the gardens and commercial tenants, forms the arc of the 'K'.

Look-see

If this guide has whetted your appetite for more, surf www.nlb.gov.sg for a virtual preview of the building at Virtual Flythrough, created by Singapore Polytechnic students.

My precious

Dubbed NLB's crown jewel, the seven-storey Lee Kong Chian Reference Library - spanning from Level 7 to Level 13 - is a treasure trove of 500,000 items ranging from country market reports to ultra-rare books on Malayan flora from the 19th century.

Nostalgia

The St Andrew's Cross was literally ripped from the Stamford Road library entrance and recast in the new plaza on the side facing Victoria Street.

Captain, My Captain

Ahoy! Sail the South Seas with China's Admiral Zheng He, the gallant Muslim maritime hero, on the 600th anniversary of his maiden voyage to these parts. NLB's *Zheng He and Maritime Asia Exhibition* on Level 10 will showcase his contributions to economy, religion and technology in the region from August 2005 to February 2006.

Posters

Remember those 'Small Family, Happy Family', 'Be a Gracious Singaporean' and anti-spitting government posters of yore? These retro slogans are all on display in its Singapore and South-east Asian collections for you to better understand public policy changes over the years (or just for a giggle). The collection includes political manifestoes, videos of past political rallies and records of election results.

Quiet alarms

On top of the screaming ones, that is. There are strobe-lighting fire alarms for readers who are deaf, thanks to the input of seven focus groups which suggested that NLB should install them. Vox populi rules - on this count.

Recycle

In its basement nestled amid bamboo trees is a 5,000-brick wall built from the remnants of the old Stamford Road library. Companies can buy a piece of history by commissioning sculptures from other salvaged bricks. Those with cash to spare can also bag a commemorative bookmark and a chunk of the Stamford Road HQ brick for \$10 each, which goes to charity. Click on www.comchest.org.sg

Sunscreen

Giant intelligent window blinds scroll down automatically when the sun is low enough in the sky to sneak past the fixed shades, usually around 4.30pm. The building's lights also switch off automatically whenever there is enough daylight for one to read without squinting.



Triple joy

Talk about a study to die for. At Level 11, there is a triple volume library floor with a book wall almost 6m high housing the Singapore and South-east Asian collections.

Underground

You can now get your reading fix at the Central Lending Library in the basement, where 134,000 books, ranging from the arts to business management, are yours for the picking. Remember to check out its collection of award-winning literature in all four languages.

Vertigo

Stand at the Pod's edge on Level 16 and peer down a dizzying height of 102.8m to road level. Aiiiee! Even the toilets have this killer view - they have glass walls so you can scan the horizon. But you will get to do so by invitation only.

Wired

Check out NLB's enlarged Digital Library at www.nlb.gov.sg for digitised rare material. Coming soon: An expanded list of more than 70 online databases, such as the Bibliography of Asian Studies, Factiva and NLB-owned Singapore Infopedia, which tells you all about the nation's roots. Log on at the NLB's computer terminals for 3 cents a minute or bring your laptop and surf wirelessly for free.

X-treme shelving

There is a total of 15km of bookshelves in this building, which is roughly the length of the Central Expressway (15.5km).

Yesteryear

Reading in Singapore goes back a long way, if you go by the exhibition of library heritage from the 1800s, *From Books to Bytes*, on Level 5.

Zephyr

Hang on to your hats - its ground floor plaza is designed to be a wind trap, channelling air between the building's two blocks so that it is replete with zephyrs, or gentle breezes.

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