



H O W P E O P L E L I V E



# Malaya and Singapore



HOW PEOPLE LIVE IN

# **MALAYA AND SINGAPORE**

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**MARION W. WARD, M.SC., PH.D.**



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**MALAYA AND  
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## HOW PEOPLE LIVE

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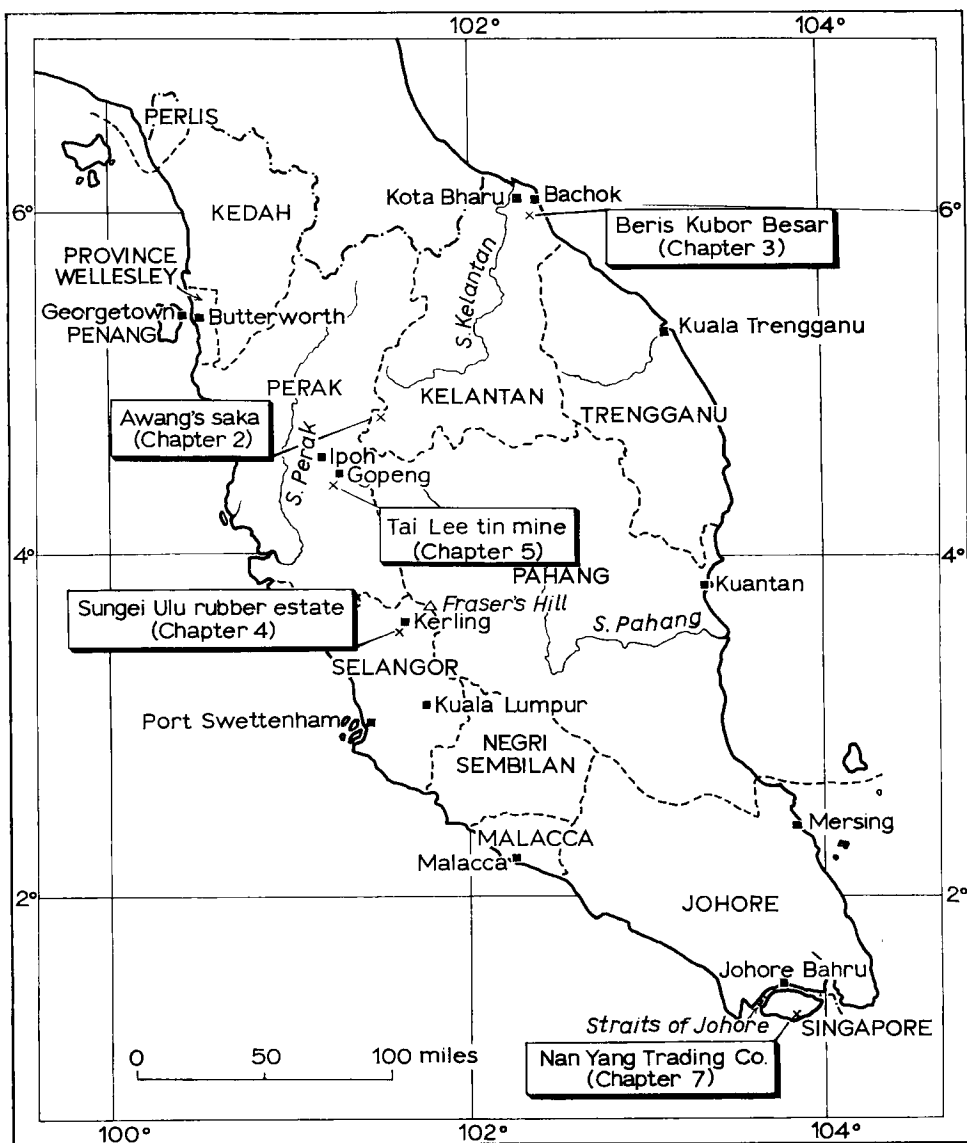


FIGURE 1. *Malaya and Singapore*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

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AT the south-eastern corner of Asia a long finger of land runs south to the equator. For a thousand miles it separates the Indian Ocean from the South China Sea and forms a bridge between the main block of Asia and the lines of islands that form a pathway to Australia. The southern half of this peninsula is the country of Malaya, with the island of Singapore at its southernmost tip. In the north the narrow peninsula is shared by Burma and Thailand.

When men first walked into the peninsula some thousands of years ago, probably from the north, they found a land of parallel north-south mountain ranges with a fringe of coastal plains. The mountains can be traced through Burma and Thailand to the eastern end of the Himalayan chain. They then run south-eastward through Indonesia. In Malaya they consist mostly of hard granite rocks. At the edges of the granite there are sometimes very steep-sided hills of limestone. Long ago the granite was probably covered with a layer of limestone, but this rock is soluble in water. Gradually it was washed away until only a small amount is left. You can see from the two maps on page 2 how the main mountain ranges of Malaya are built of granite, and how the limestone lies on both sides of the hard rock mountain cores.

It is important to know a little about these rocks because at

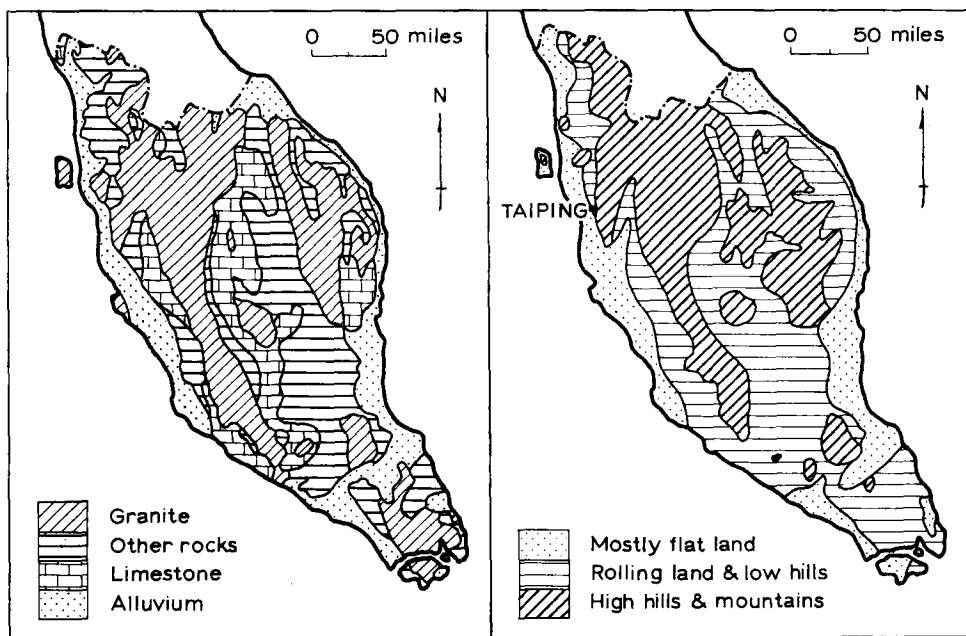
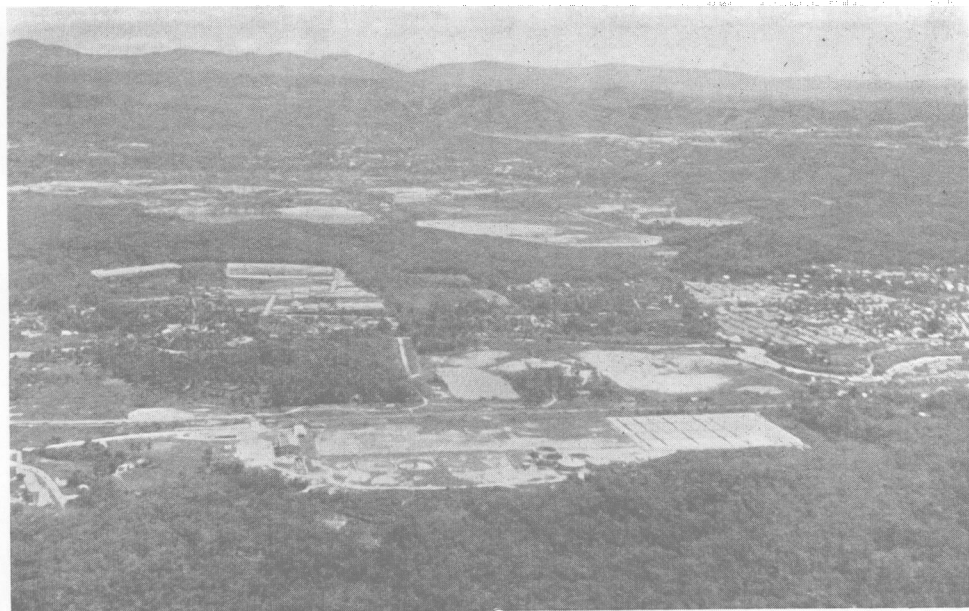


FIGURE 2. *The left hand map shows the kinds of rocks which form the land of Malaya ; the right hand map shows the shape of the land surface. You can see that the shape of the surface is related to the nature of the rocks below it.*

places where the granite and the limestone meet tin ore is found. Some of it (on the granite side) is in veins, but much of it was washed away with the limestone to be carried down and deposited at the base of the ranges. In time large areas of lowlands were built up by the silt-carrying rivers. Most of the west coast and the south of Malaya were made in this way. Many of the rivers are still carrying on this process. The Sungei Kelantan in the north-east is a good example. Each wet season its tributaries in the mountains become swollen and muddy, and silt is carried down to the slower flowing main river. It has built a large plain near the coast, and its delta is still growing.

Largely because of its position between two oceans Malaya is a wet country. Only in the highest parts of Britain is there as much



*Aerial view over the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur in the western lowlands of Malaya. Rubber trees cover the low hills in the foreground and centre while the lakes and bare ground are the landscape of tin mining.*

rainfall as there is in the driest parts of Malaya. Twice each year the whole wind system which governs the weather of south and east Asia sweeps back and forth across the Malayan peninsula. From October to March north-east winds blow from the South China Sea and bring heavy rain to the eastern side of Malaya. From June to September the south-westerly winds dominate, but because Sumatra shelters southern Malaya these hot summer months are often moderately dry. The months of April-May and October-November are periods of changeover and often have disturbed weather with much heavy rain. Every month in Malaya has some rain, and some have more than twenty-five inches. The graphs on page 4 show you the pattern of rainfall on the east and west sides of Malaya and at Singapore. The wettest parts of Malaya are high up in the

## MALAYA AND SINGAPORE

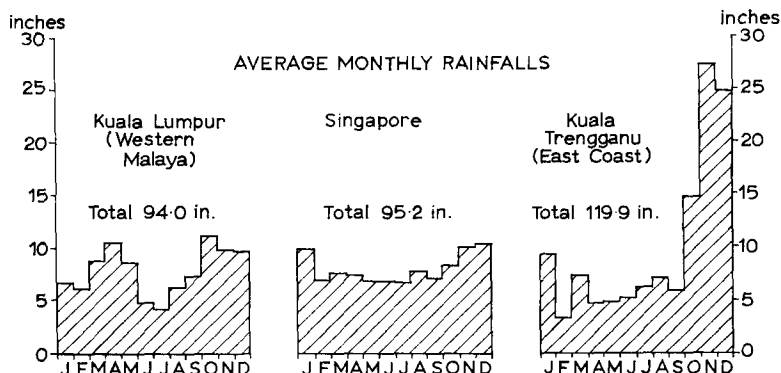


FIGURE 3. *The annual pattern of rainfall varies from place to place in Malaya. These graphs show that Singapore's rain falls all round the year, while in Western Malaya there are usually two rainfall peaks (in April and October) separated by a drier season. On the eastern side of Malaya October to January are the rainiest months, while April to September are comparatively dry.*

mountains. The high points just east of Taiping (shown in the map on page 2) have more than 200 inches of rain a year. Rain falls heavily in Malaya, but only rarely does it go on for days on end. Usually a storm blows over in a few hours and the hot sun makes the air steamy afterwards.

Because Malaya is only just north of the equator it has very warm and even temperatures. It is almost always more than 75° F. (24° C.), the temperature of warm summer days in England. Often the nights are a little cooler than the days, but there is not much variation between seasons. The coolest places are the highest. Areas which lie 2,000 to 3,000 feet above sea-level have temperatures 7 to 10° F. below those of the lowlands.

The first primitive settlers in Malaya found that almost all the land was covered with dense evergreen forest. The trees have broad leaves which are often tough and leathery. There are a great many different species. Conifers and treeferns are rare, but a few are found on the cooler higher mountain tops. The trees of the virgin

jungle soar on thick trunks 60 or 100 feet into the air. Their crowns spread together to make a cushion-like appearance from above. They cut off much of the sunlight. Young trees, creepers and climbing plants struggle to grow up towards the light. Everywhere in the crooks of branches, on trunks, on fallen logs and on the ground grow ferns and a great variety of other plants. From the ground inside the jungle there is little bright colour, only a great variety of greens and browns. High up among the tree tops are bright splashes of orchids and trees in flower. Leaves fall from the forest trees all through the year, and the dull reds of young shoots and leaf sprays are often quite conspicuous.

The forests are the home of many species of wild animals. Malaya has most of the animals of tropical Asia, including elephants, rhinoceros, tigers, bears, and fierce wild buffaloes called *seladang*. There are deer, tapir and wild pig, lizards and snakes, porcupines, and many smaller animals, as well as a host of birds and insects. Most of these animals can detect humans before they are themselves seen, and so you may spend long periods in the jungle without seeing many large animals.

The coasts of Malaya have a different vegetation. In many areas a gently sloping muddy coastline or river mouth is an ideal home for mangrove trees. These plants grow in salty water, and often form "forests" of trees about forty feet high. Mangrove wood is much prized for making charcoal, which is the main cooking fuel in Malaya. Today the mangrove areas are carefully looked after to help the trees grow well and to keep a steady supply of wood and charcoal. The muddy mangrove forests are the home of crocodiles, and a few people make a living hunting them for their skins. On the north-east coast there is a different type of open forest or grassland. The most common tree is the casuarina, a graceful, filmy, grey-green tree. A few other shrubs and grasses grow with it, and together they form a pleasant edge to the silver or golden sand beaches of Trengganu and Kelantan.

The first men in Malaya probably knew only stone and bone tools. They hunted animals and gathered plant foods in the jungles. Caves in the soft limestone provided shelter. Later, more waves of people from the north brought tools of bronze and iron. These peoples also knew how to cultivate the land. At first this probably meant clearing a small piece of ground and thrusting a shoot from a wild banana plant into the soft moist earth or throwing down a few seeds of grain. Somewhere further north people had learnt how to grow rice under irrigation. Gradually the idea spread southwards from Thailand to the fertile lowlands of coastal Malaya. Growing wet rice and cultivation of fruit trees and other plants became the common way of life. The hunting and gathering tribes were pushed farther back into the forested hills. Today remnants of several primitive tribal groups can be found in the uplands. The second chapter of this book tells you how some of them live.

The late-comers, who still occupy the Malayan lowlands, are called Malays. Their skin is light brown and their hair black and straight. They are a slight, graceful people. Malay traditions and written records tell us that they have lived in Malaya for well over 1,000 years. They liked to live near rivers or water, and several of the major river valleys became distinct Malay communities. Thus there came into being several small Malay states : Pahang, Trengganu, Kelantan, Perak, Kedah, Perlis and a number of others. In south central Malaya a number of very small territories banded together in a confederation called Negri Sembilan, the " nine lands ". Today these states, as well as Johore and Selangor, are part of the Federation of Malaya. The map in Figure 1 shows you where these states are. You can still tell Malays from certain parts of the country by the differences in the way they speak the Malay language. A Trengganu countryman can hardly be understood by a well-educated Malay aristocrat from Johore.

Many Malays, especially in Kedah, Kelantan and Negri Sem-



*Malay men and boys going home after attending the mosque on the top of the hill one Friday morning in Mersing, south-east Malaya.*

bilan, were and still are rice growers. Others have always had a strong interest in the sea. They are good sailors and fishermen. In the past they were famous as traders. The Malayan peninsula stands across any direct sea route between India and China. Malay trading ports have grown up on either coast of the peninsula. Traders from India, Arabia, China and Indonésia came to these towns to buy and sell merchandise from east and west. Sometimes these port cities lay at the ends of overland routes by which people and goods crossed the peninsula. Often they were built in a position that commanded the sea routes to east and west. One of the most famous of them all was Malacca.

Malacca was founded about 1403 by a Malay prince. During the fifteenth century it grew to be a trading port as busy as Venice. In fact its rise was closely connected with that of Venice. Both grew rich on the spice trade. Nutmeg, mace, cloves, cinnamon and pepper were essential in Europe at that time. In those days people

in Europe had to slaughter many of their animals at the beginning of the winter, and salt the meat to keep it. Spices helped make it edible. There were many other uses for them too, as recipes for the old English drinks of mulled wine and mulled ale show. At that time only a few remote islands (the Moluccas) in eastern Indonesia grew spices.

Small Arab and Indonesian trading ships brought the spices from the Molucca Islands to Malacca. There they were sold to merchants from many countries and taken on to Europe, China and other parts of Asia. Malacca became a central market-place for the eastern world. Cloth and rice from India, incense and opium from Arabia, precious stones and musk from Burma, gold, silk and porcelain from China, camphor and diamonds from Borneo, pepper, gold and rhinoceros horn from Sumatra, rice and sugar from Java, and tin, gold and camphor from Malaya, all changed hands in Malacca. The rulers of the port took a share of every cargo, but there was enough for many to prosper.

Seven thousand miles away (nearly twelve months' sailing time) the western European nations were beginning to consider the possibilities of winning a share in the profitable spice trade to the East. The city port of Venice had cornered the trade from Egypt, which was the land terminus of one of the routes by which spices came to Europe. The Portuguese were the first to realise that by sailing around the southern tip of Africa to India and beyond, they would break the power of Venice. In 1489 Vasco da Gama reached India, and in 1511, after a bitter fight against the Malays, the Portuguese captured Malacca.

For 130 years Malacca was a Portuguese garrison town, and for much of that time the Portuguese made great profits out of the trade that passed through it. But the Malays hated the Portuguese for taking their trade and for their cruelty and greed. The small garrison had to be constantly on guard against attack, and many battles were fought around the fortress that the Portuguese built.



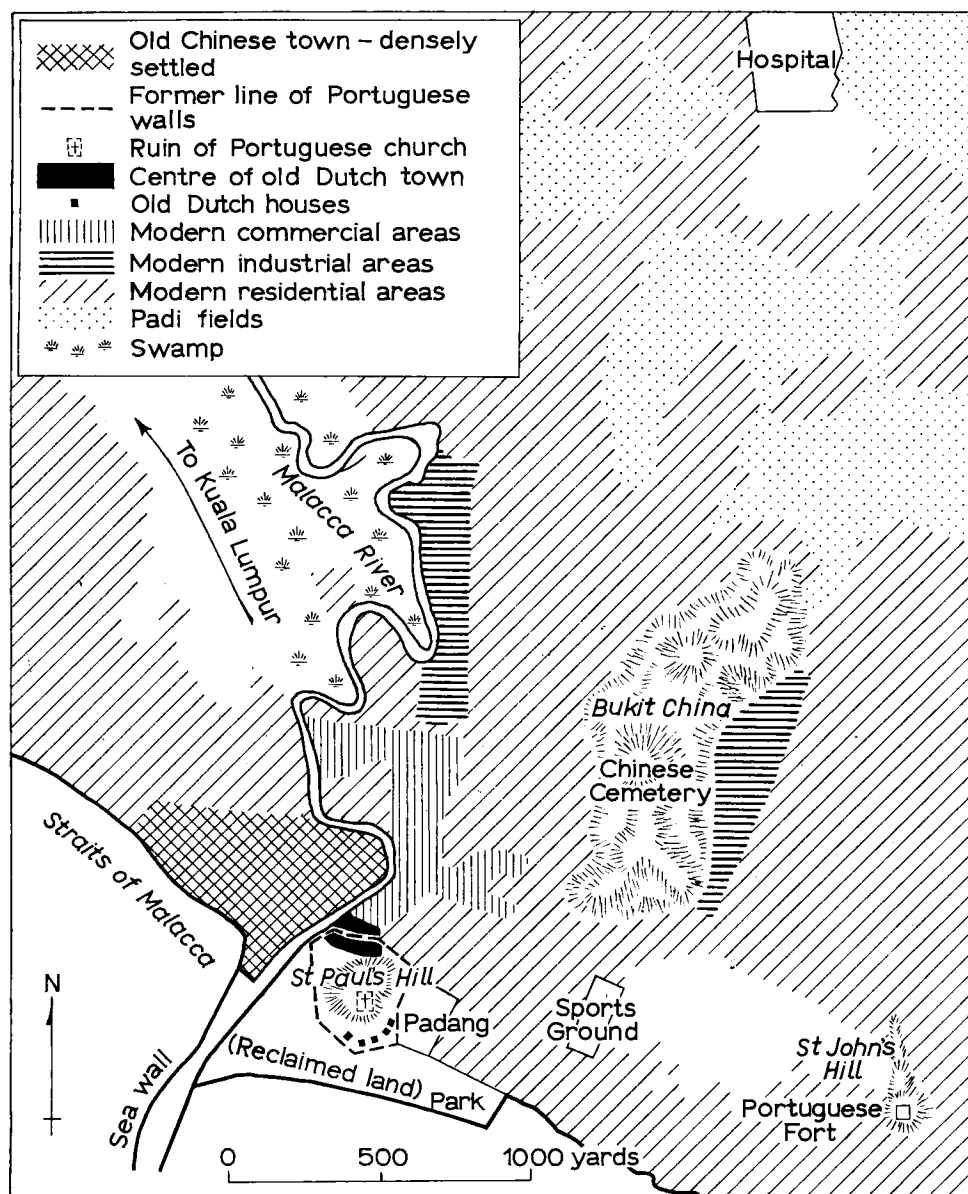


FIGURE 4. *Malacca*