

NTU Singapore revitalises Yunnan Garden as a place for leisure, education and heritage



The rejuvenated Yunnan Garden, a sprawling open space of greenery, waterscapes and heritage landmarks, will officially open at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) on 13 February 2020.

Built in the 1950s, the Yunnan Garden was a key attraction of the Nanyang University campus, the land on which NTU Singapore is now situated. With the just-completed revitalisation effort, the Yunnan Garden is seamlessly integrated with the Chinese Heritage Centre and an expanded Nanyang Lake. More than 1,000 new trees comprising over 80 species have been planted in the Garden, enriching its biodiversity. Other enrichments include a new 5.6-metre-tall waterfall, themed mini gardens, a boardwalk, a new stormwater management system, and Wi-Fi connectivity throughout the Garden.

The result is a 9-hectare heritage precinct – bigger than 12 soccer fields – that preserves the Garden’s legacy while enriching it as an educational and recreation hub, making it a go-to place not just for the NTU community, but also for the residents who live in the wider Jurong neighbourhood.

NTU Chairman Mr Koh Boon Hwee said: “Yunnan Garden as an icon harks back to the days of Nanyang University. Whilst we embrace our heritage, the campus cannot stand still and be frozen in time. The rejuvenation of Yunnan Garden is part of the NTU Campus Master Plan.

“With new features such as Wi-Fi connectivity, water coolers and wheelchair accessibility, our aim is to transform Yunnan Garden into an inclusive attraction that is in sync with the times, relevant and useful to today’s students, as well as offering the larger Singapore community an attractive green lung in our urban city.”

NTU President Professor Subra Suresh said: “The NTU campus is well recognised as one of the world’s most beautiful campuses. The revitalised Yunnan Garden stands amidst new iconic structures at NTU such as The Hive, the Wave, the Arc and the School of Art, Design and Media building, telling a visual story of NTU’s and Singapore’s transformation as an Asian and global hub for education, research and innovation, and of the progress of the nation.”

Celebrating heritage

Built in the 1950s, the Yunnan Garden has historical significance as the birthplace of Nanyang University. Its design, a series of loops and geometric patterns, is inspired by elements from traditional Chinese gardens and the formal, symmetrical, and highly ordered gardens of the French Renaissance periods.

The Garden’s legacy has been carefully preserved, with the Chinese Heritage Centre serving as the centrepiece of the heritage precinct, together with the Nanyang University Memorial, the pavilions, and elements such as the Nanyang Arch replica and the Senegal Mahogany trees from the 1960s. The grass slope in front of the Chinese Heritage Centre still bears the Chinese saying: “To thrive in adversity, to strive and improve oneself constantly”.

Mr Tan Yew Beng, President of the Association of Nanyang University Graduates, said: “I hope the rejuvenated Yunnan Garden at NTU will become a new landmark that appeals to current and future generations of students, much like how it was for us. With more green spaces and improvements like boardwalks, the space will become more vibrant and user-friendly for all to visit. I welcome all alumni to visit the new space and hold gatherings there to maintain their connection with the university community.”

An inclusive space for all

Aside from celebrating its heritage, NTU’s Yunnan Garden aims to be a vibrant recreation and gathering space that has something for everyone.

Nature enthusiasts can explore the Garden’s rich biodiversity of flora and fauna through its mini gardens and nature trails centred on various themes, such as orchids, national flowers from Southeast Asia, and herbs. They can also go on a boardwalk that connects the Garden and the newly expanded Nanyang Lake, which now flows into the Garden.

Complementing the greenery are collections of new water and landscape features. A man-made waterfall feature is combined with water cascades and artificial wetlands built with layers of differently-sized particles such as sand and gravel to filter the water in Nanyang Lake, removing sediments and pollutants from the water.

To enable more people to enjoy this green haven, the Garden has new features such as Wi-Fi connectivity, improved lighting and paths for wheelchairs and strollers. Health-conscious visitors can exercise at the outdoor fitness stations alongside the Nanyang Lake, and then rehydrate with the water coolers in the Garden.

For the official opening, there is also an augmented reality trail – a tour that takes visitors through the Garden’s historical and green features, and offers interactive activities through mobile phones via the free app, NTU HEY! AR.

NTU Students’ Union President Bryan Michael Chiew Sen, a second-year Public Policy and Global Affairs student from the School of Social Sciences, said: “The new amenities in the Yunnan Garden are a refreshing addition to what we traditionally know as a heritage area with historical significance. With the rejuvenation, the Garden is now an invigorating break away from the classroom, and an attractive spot for students to have social gatherings. The spruced up greenery makes the Garden good for deep conversations and long strolls, which I’m certain will be beneficial for students’ mental well-being.”

Learning about plants and the environment is also part and parcel of a walk in the Yunnan Garden, which is designed around sustainability principles. The plant varieties in the mini gardens have been carefully chosen for their educational values, be it for their use as renewable energy sources or as sustainable alternatives to plastics, or their ability to remove pollutants from the air, soil and water.

The water features in the Garden are designed to create a stormwater management system that purifies rainwater before releasing it into larger ponds and reservoirs through drains and canals.

Integrating these lessons into the Yunnan Garden experience is part of NTU’s commitment to raising awareness about environmental sustainability.

President Suresh said: “As a university, we strive to incorporate a sense of discovery and curiosity into everything we do, so that even a walk in the park could inspire you and spark new ideas. Aside from its historical significance, the Garden also boasts a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna, small ecological communities and thoughtfully-designed water features that show our commitment to sustainability. This is yet another example of how NTU walks the sustainability talk.”

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