



# (foodwalker) the north side of Geylang Serai

By Kevin F. Cox

Geylang Serai is the “bad boy” of Singapore. It’s a gritty, rough-around-the-edges neighbourhood by Singapore standards – which is to say it really isn’t.

Not as tidy and ordered as other parts of Singapore, Geylang Serai is crowded and bustling. Intermixed in this urbanised area are numerous Chinese and Buddhist clan associations and small ornate temples on nearly every street, making for a delightful walk filled with both food and culture.

Like a chameleon, the neighbourhood changes complexion dramatically from day to night, both in terms of its more infamous trappings (pub crawling and prostitution) and the options for remarkable food. Indeed, many locals argue that Geylang is the best food neighbourhood on the island, with excellent, hole-in-the-wall eating houses serving savoury dumplings, stir-fries, vegetarian meals and seafood dishes at almost any hour.

It’s impossible to sample all of the great foods available along the two main arteries of Sims Avenue and Geylang Road, so this month’s foodwalk will cover an area that many ignore – the north side of Geylang. (A future foodwalk will cover the rest.)

Start your foodwalk at the Aljunied MRT exit toward Sims Avenue. Just a few steps along Lorong Avenue 25A, is **Mufiz Restaurant** (#58 Lor 25A) offering *murtabak* or *roti prata* and a curry gravy that’s robust and delicious. Or for a classic, Penang (*assam*) laksa, step into **Penang Seafood Restaurant** (#76 Lor 25A). Completely different from the more common *nonya laksa* found everywhere, *assam laksa* is fish-based, with sweet and sour flavours and chunks of pineapple mixed into the noodles.

**Counter-clockwise:** The incredible 9.9 metre Goddess of Mercy at Foo Hai Ch’an; Penang (*assam*) laksa is an alternative to the common (*nonya*) version; Mufiz Restaurant has good *roti prata* and *murtabak*; Eating houses offer excellent food on nearly every corner in Geylang





At the corner, make a left onto Sims Avenue and head down one block to Lorong 27, where the **Ho Kee Pau** stall makes excellent dim sum, dumplings and congee. The silky *hor fun* noodles are delightful. Go to Lorong 27 to **Yes Natural Cakehouse** (#53-55 Lor 27) for a selection of – yes, natural – Chinese pastries and confections. Their specialty, *tau sar piah*, a Hokkien bean paste pastry, is hard to beat. But don't go around Chinese New Year when the queue stretches down the block.

If local, homemade sauces appeal, head up to **Kwong Cheon Thye** Chinese grocery store (#61-63 Lor 27) to poke around the many hard-to-find kitchen goods as well as tools of the mooncake trade. When done, retrace your steps back to Sims Avenue and make a left.

Sims Avenue has many small shops along the traditional five-foot way lining both sides of the street. Here you will find Buddhist products and a general array of Malay goods and dried foods. Medicinal herbs and health-improving food is very popular in this area. At **Kwan Inn Vegetarian Food** stall (134

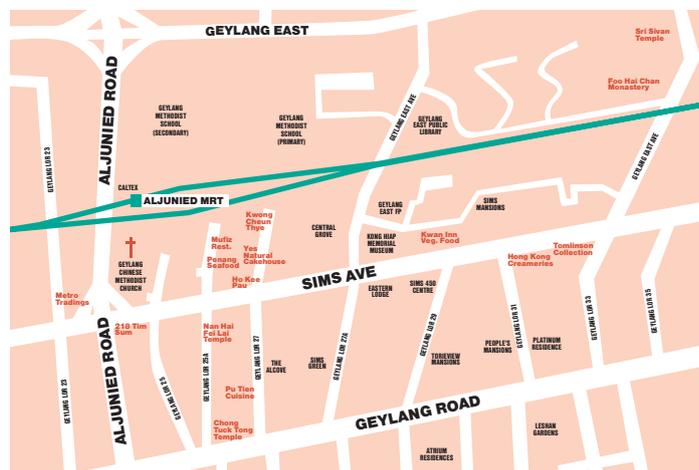
Geylang East Ave 1, across from Lor 29) an enormous clay, lacquered pot is filled with small bowls of tonic soups prepared to cure what ails you: core-cooling, body-warming and energising elixirs that have been consumed for centuries in China.

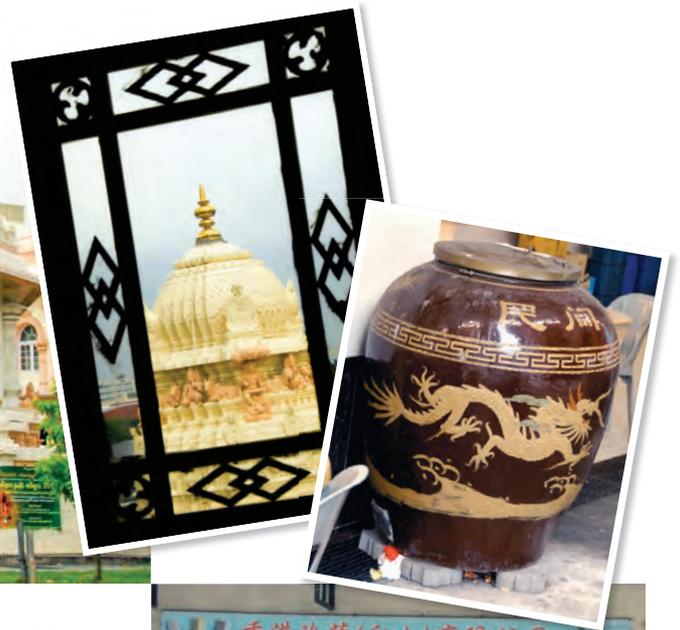
The next large intersection is Geylang East Avenue 2. Make a left here and walk a block to the spectacular **Foo Hai Ch'an Monastery** (87 Geylang East Ave 2), which houses a beautiful 9.9 metre Goddess of Mercy statue. The Main Shrine Hall presents an interesting look at Tang Dynasty architecture unlike any in Singapore, including six matching statues of monks and a gorgeous five-storey pagoda. Next door is the **Sri Sivan Temple** (24 Geylang East Ave 2), a unique Hindu place of worship with an octagonal structure and detail of uncommon beauty. These hallowed structures are often overlooked by hungry foodwalkers in Geylang, but should not be missed.

Back at Sims Avenue, cross the road and to your right is the **Tomlinson Collection** (460 Sims Ave), a well-

**Clockwise from top left:** Ho Kee Pau's steamed buns and dumplings are some of the best; Geylang has a high concentration of clan association clubhouses; Kwan Inn offers some of the best, and cheapest, vegetarian food; Yes Natural Cakehouse has excellent pastries and egg tarts; Eating houses offer excellent food on nearly every corner in Geylang

**Right:** The five-storey pagoda at Foo Hai Ch'an Monastery





respected antique shop and gallery with exceptional quality Chinese furniture and sculpture. Just a couple of doors away you can satisfy your sweet tooth at **Hong Kong Creameries** (324 Sims Ave), where many street vendors provision their bicycle ice-boxes in the mornings. The ice cream is cut into large rectangles, ready to become ice cream sandwiches, but if you are really nice the guy may give you a smaller sample.

Make a left onto Lorong 27 and you will see the **Nan Hai Fei Lai Temple** (35 Lor 27), where parents pray for their children's success in school exams. Continue down the block to the corner of Geylang Road, turn right and stroll past the **Chong Tuck Tong Temple** (477 Geylang Road) with the gold Goddess of Mercy standing atop its roof. Several stalls along here sell an array of duck parts which, though odd to see, taste delicious.

At Lorong 25, turn right and make your way past a collection of attractive shophouses and eating establishments, like **Pu Tien Cuisine Restaurant** (2 Lor 27) where, if you are still hungry, you can get a taste of the little-known Hing Hwa food from China's Fujian Province. From here you can make a left on Sims Road and follow your nose to the ticklish fragrance of Geylang's trademark durian, sold at several fruit stands along the street, including **Metro Trading Fruit Company** (183 Sims Ave). It sells different varieties of the king of fruits, like D15 and the most popular one: D24. Across the street, seal your stomach with some excellent, fresh-made dim sum at **218 Tim Sum** (corner of Sims Ave and Lor 17). Heading back along Sims Avenue, pause briefly to birdwatch at **Aik Guan Pet Trading** (198 Sims Ave) on your way to Aljunied MRT, where you started. 🐦

*Clockwise from left:  
The Sri Sivan Temple;  
The Sri Sivan Temple  
from the Foo Hai Ch'an  
pagoda;  
lacquered pot filled  
with tonics and healing  
soups;  
Hong Kong  
Creameries, where ice  
cream vendors fill their  
coolers;  
Geylang is famous  
for its durian, which  
you can smell on the  
streets;  
many beautiful birds  
sing at Aik Guan Pet  
Trading shop*



### About Foodwalker

Kevin F. Cox is a writer and culinary explorer with a passion for Singaporean food. As our Foodwalker, he wanders Singapore's neighbourhoods, preparing the way for you to make your own great food discoveries. <http://kevincoxon.com>

