



OPEN HOUSE ADVENTURES

THE CURIOUS SOUNDS OF THE ISTANA

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Since the Istana was built back in 1869, it has become an important part of the nation's history. Over the years, the Istana has played a major role not only as the official residence of the president but also as the consummate host to visiting foreign dignitaries. In recent times, Singaporeans from all walks of life have also been warmly welcomed to spend the day enjoying the rich heritage and lush greenery of the Istana grounds, by way of open houses, receptions and picnics throughout the year.

The Istana Open Houses naturally became the setting for *Open House Adventures*, a three-book series that has been specially commissioned to commemorate the Istana's 150th anniversary. I cannot think of a more wonderful way to bring forth the well of amazing stories that lies behind the Istana and its grounds than through the eyes of four intrepid young children—much like you—

who embark on some wildly unexpected adventures at the Istana.

In *The Curious Sounds of the Istana*, the four explorers, Priya, Zulkifli, Jing Kai and Julailah, have a surprise encounter with the president. That fortuitous meeting leads them to Uncle John, a volunteer gardener, who presents these lucky children with an old map that turns out to be a portal to explore the Istana's flora and fauna in the most spectacular way. When you are done reading, you may not look at the Istana's stunning grounds in quite the same way again.

Through these fun, imaginative stories proudly told and illustrated by our fellow Singaporeans, it is my wish that you, the future of Singapore, can share in the magic of the Istana. I hope you will enjoy reading *Open House Adventures*!

Mdm Halimah Yacob

President of the Republic of Singapore



CHAPTER ONE



Tut tut tut tut!

A little red-and-black bird whizzed in and out of the nearby shrubs with their pink trumpet blossoms. Its wings were flapping as quickly as the metallic *tut tut tut* of its call.

Julailah, a five-year-old little bundle of energy, was chasing the little feathered creature around. She loved creatures of all kinds—insects were her first love—but birds were a close second.

“Jul, I’ve got a question for you! Why did the hummingbird hum?” Zulkifli was Julailah’s 12-year-old brother, and he had a joke for every occasion.

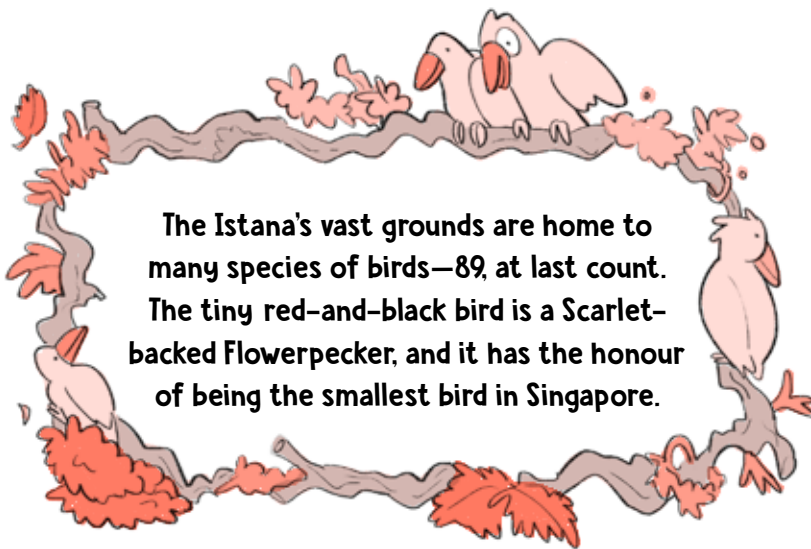
“I don’t knowwwwww!”

“Because it didn’t know the words!” He laughed uproariously at his own joke.

Julailah giggled. Her big brother could always make her laugh.

It was a hot, sunny morning and the queue to get into the Istana Open House was unabating. Today, the Istana was open to the public in celebration of the Labour Day public holiday, and the four children had come all the way from Yishun to visit the official residence of President Halimah Yacob.

Nine-year-old Jing Kai wiped the sweat off his forehead, but a sweat patch had already formed on his polo tee. “My teacher says



The Istana's vast grounds are home to many species of birds—89, at last count. The tiny red-and-black bird is a Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker, and it has the honour of being the smallest bird in Singapore.

that nothing worth doing comes easy, so I guess this must be really worth doing!” he quipped.

As the children chatted and munched on potato chips, Julailah spotted a mottled brown insect on her water bottle. She leaned in closer to have a look at it. It was a beetle no bigger than the nail of her little finger.

But before she'd had a proper look, the beetle opened its wings and flew away. Determined to study the little creature more closely, Julailah silently scampered off after it, unnoticed by the other children.

“Okay, so once we get past this madness, we'll make a beeline to collect the binoculars for the birdwatching activity that I've signed us all up for. Everyone, follow me, okay?” Eleven-year-old Priya said, maybe a bit too bossily.

“Jul, do you want the last chip?” Zulkifli turned around to ask his little sister, but she was not standing where she had been just one minute ago.

“Wait, has anyone seen Jul?” He turned around and tried not to panic.



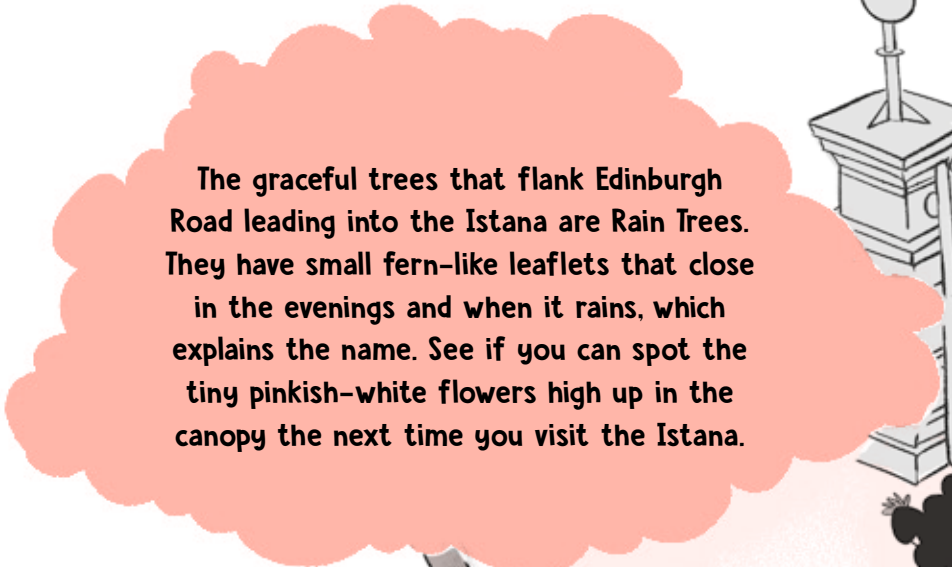
“There she is!” Jing Kai yelled and pointed at the gates. He’d seen Julailah in her glittery pink princess dress, running helter-skelter through the crowd.

The three children gave chase, trying not to lose sight of little Julailah.

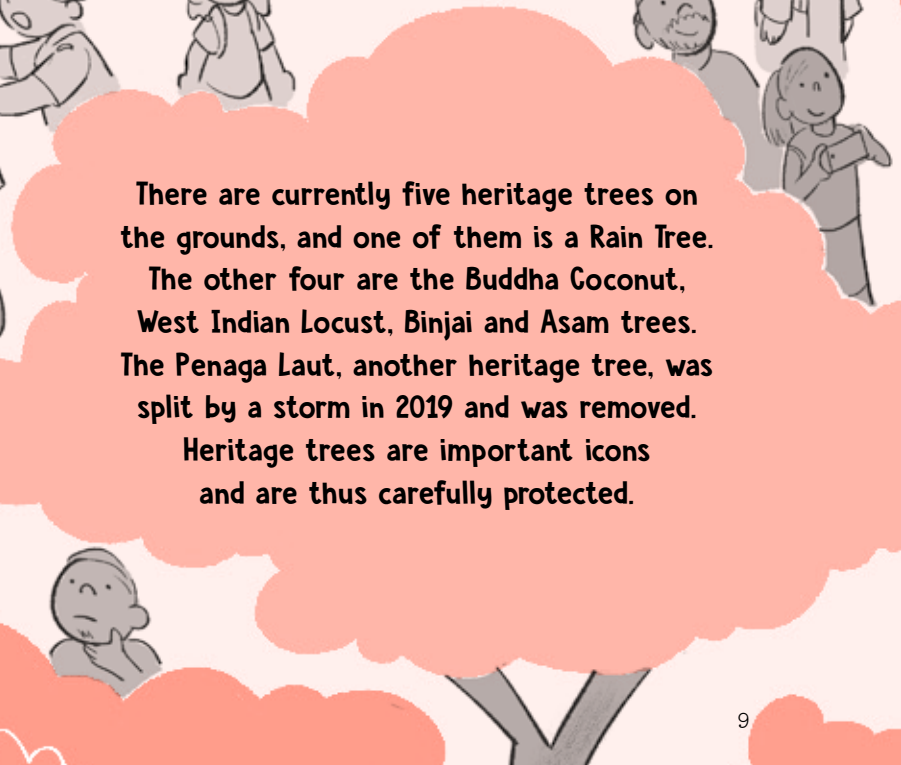
“Excuse me, excuse me!” Zulkifli huffed as he stumbled through the crowd.

Down the children ran, through an avenue of stately trees with large umbrella-shaped crowns, with Priya leading the pack. She was on the school athletics team and was fast.

“JUL! WAIT FOR US!”



The graceful trees that flank Edinburgh Road leading into the Istana are Rain Trees. They have small fern-like leaflets that close in the evenings and when it rains, which explains the name. See if you can spot the tiny pinkish-white flowers high up in the canopy the next time you visit the Istana.



There are currently five heritage trees on the grounds, and one of them is a Rain Tree. The other four are the Buddha Coconut, West Indian Locust, Binjai and Asam trees. The Penaga Laut, another heritage tree, was split by a storm in 2019 and was removed. Heritage trees are important icons and are thus carefully protected.

Shell is proud to partner with the President's Office to bring you this special trilogy of children's books. Did you know that this is the first time that the President's Office has commissioned books on the Istana specially for young people like you? This is because the national monument is celebrating its 150th birthday. Through these three books, you will follow four young adventurers as they discover the history, people and nature of the Istana.

Like the Istana, Shell's history in Singapore also goes back to the 19th century, specifically to the year 1891. That was when Shell started Singapore's first kerosene storage depot on Pulau Bukom, an island five kilometres south of Singapore. In 1961, we built Singapore's first oil refinery and we have not looked back since.

Over the years, Shell has grown with the country, investing in our assets here, investing in the people who worked to grow our business and investing in the community that we are a part of. Shell is proud to call Singapore home, and we want to continue to provide you and your families with more and cleaner energy solutions for a sustainable future. Let's continue to power progress together.



Aw Kah Peng

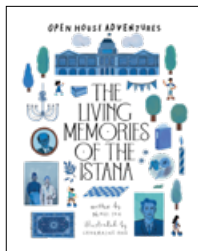
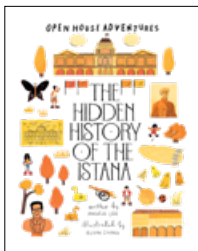
Chairman, Shell Companies in Singapore

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Zulkifli, Priya, Jing Kai and Julailah are at the Istana Open House. Their bird-watching expedition takes on a different dimension when the cool Uncle John gives them a MYSTERIOUS MAP that takes them on a merry chase, led by some curious feathered friends.

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