Kampung calm

One of S’pore’s last kampungs made the news recently when the rain brought floods. So what’s life in this village in Hougang like? SIM CHI YIN reports

EVERY weekend is a holiday away from home for Muhammad Nasir, 11. Come Friday or Saturday night, he heads for his aunt’s house in Kampung Lorong Buangkok - possibly Singapore’s last kampung.

The 28-household kampung - in the news recently because it was flooded - may be just a stone’s throw away from gleaming new HDB flats off Yio Cho Kang Road.

But it is also a world away.

The place comes alive with weekend visitors like Muhammad and his cousins.

That’s how it’s been for a decade, said Miss Sng Mui Hong, a former factory worker who has been living there for almost 50 years. Her sister and two brothers drop by during the weekends too.

She said in Mandarin: ‘Ever since the older generation of residents died and their children grew up and moved away, it’s very quiet around here during the week.’

So quiet that sometimes all one hears is the chirping of birds or the sound of iguanas scurrying through the leaves.

Miss Sng, in her 50s, said: ‘At the weekends, some of the elderly folk get visits from their children, relatives and friends, so it’s livelier.’

In fact, what Muhammad likes most about his weekly treat is that he can ‘make noise’ and ‘no one will come out to scold’.

He can run freely on the grass, strum his guitar by the stream, climb coconut trees, play with marbles and have a game of football right in front of the house.

FREE TO PLAY

It is where, in his words, he ‘can come and play without permission’.

The bubbly Primary 5 student of Yio Chu Kang Primary lived in the kampung till he had to go to Primary 1. His aunt, Miss Maimah Ahmad, 47, now lives there on her own.

Said Muhammad: ‘I live in a flat but I want to live here.’ Home
now is a four-room flat in Hougang which he shares with his parents, a twin brother and an older sister.

Said the soccer nut: 'At home, I can play only computer games. If I play soccer downstairs, people come out and complain.

'It's so much more fun here.

'At home it's boring. It's never boring here.'

Not with his 28 cousins, aged between 3 and 17, dropping by at the weekends.

Muhammad's sister Nur Diana, 14, said while playing a game of table soccer on the front terrace: 'When I tell my friends where I spend my weekends, they're very surprised that there is still a kampung in Singapore.'

With all the recent publicity, the kampung has been getting more than its usual stream of visitors.

Curious locals and foreigners have been dropping by for a look at the idyllic three-acre pocket and its haphazard cluster of single-storey zinc-roofed houses.

Said Miss Sng: 'There have been families coming here to visit. The other day, we had a Frenchman and yesterday we had someone from England or America.

'And a childcare teacher came by to ask me if she could bring the kids here,' she said, joking that the residents would have to 'hide' soon.

Said Nur Diana with a laugh: 'We feel a bit like we're in a zoo.'

That just means more fun for Muhammad.

He gets to play tour guide - showing off his kampung.

Story Index

>> SINGAPORE

Marshals on the MRT
'Similar' addresses, names...
Not quite the birthday he was hoping for
Retirement not in her vocabulary
Singapore a human trafficking hotspot?
Smelly factory water turns Kranji canal purple
Kampung weekend
Kampung calm
He will take Beck's role, but not his wife

WORLD

Ex-MAS boss undergoes brain surgery
Loser horse wins hearts of Japanese
British universities helping to spy on foreign students
Welcome to Earth
One-legged swimmer beats the odds
WHY PAS LOST BIG
WHY THEY WON BIG

BUSINESS

There are no Business stories today