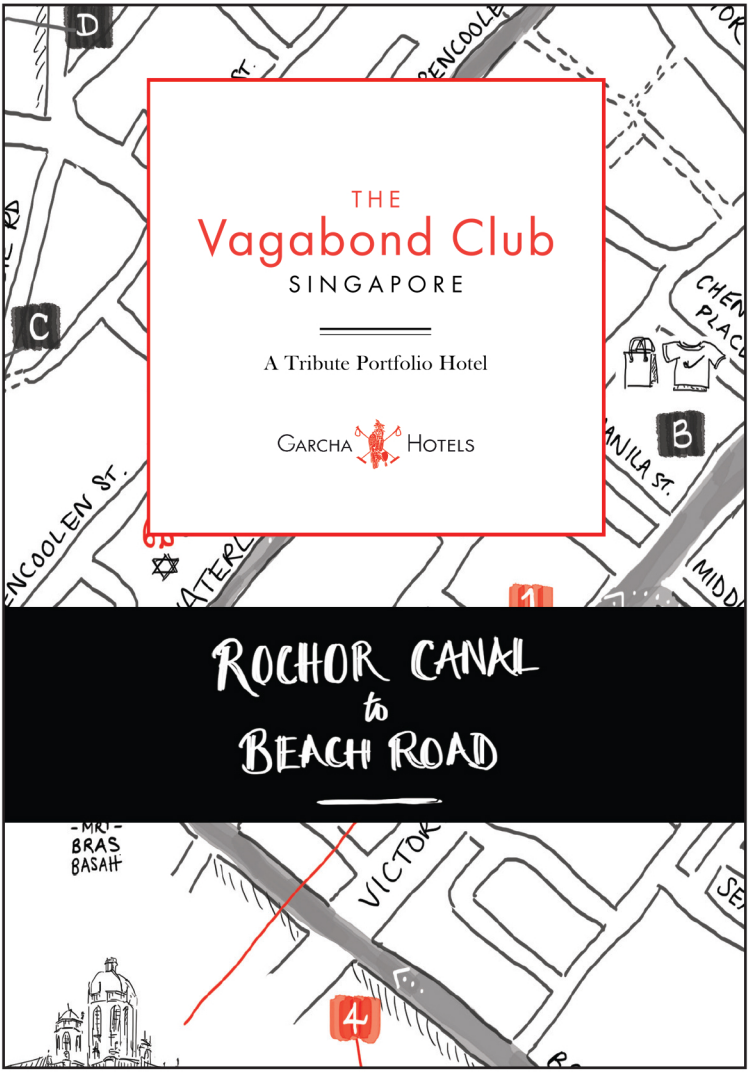
THE
Vagabond Club
SINGAPORE
A Tribute Portfolio Hotel
GARCHA HOTELS
ROCHOR CANAL
to
BEACH ROAD
- MRT -
BRAS
BASAH
VICTOR
D
C
B
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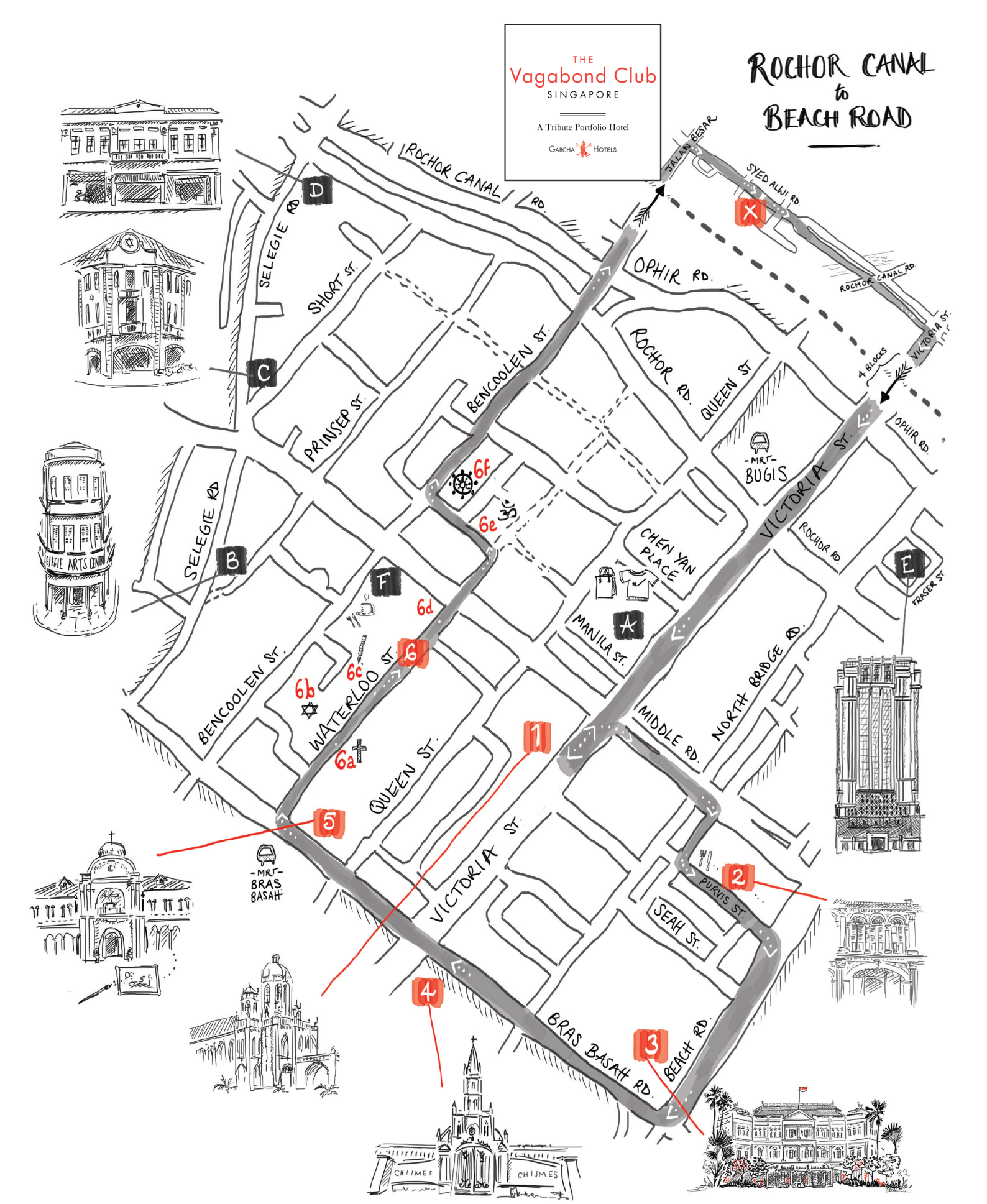

1 Saint Joseph's Church
2 Purvis Street + *restaurants*
3 Raffles Hotel
4 Chijmes
5 Singapore Art Museum
6 Waterloo Street

POI (Points of Interest):
A Bugis Street
B Selegie Art Centre
C David Elias Building
D Ellison Building
E Park View Square

Eat & Drink:
F Artichoke Café & Bar: 161 Middle Rd
2 Purvis St: - YY Kafei Dian: 37 Beach Rd
- Chin Chin: 19 Purvis St
- Garibaldi - Gunther's: 36 Purvis St
- Yingthai Palace: 36 Purvis St

ROCHOR CANAL TO BEACH ROAD

One of the oldest parts of Singapore, the British Colonials settled along Beach Road and both sides of the Singapore River from the early 1800s on. This tour focuses on interesting sites contained within the area bounded by Beach, Bras Basah, Selegie and Rochor Canal roads, a short walk from Kampong Glam and Little India. Old shophouses, particularly eye-catching along Liang Seah and Purvis streets, are mixed in with modern office buildings of all shapes and sizes.

1 – Saint Joseph's Church (143 Victoria Street) is a highly ornate Gothic Revival church built in 1912 by Swan & MacLaren, the architects responsible for much of pre-war Singapore. Whitewashed with blue trim, the pretty church was designed in the shape of a Latin cross and has beautiful stained glass, a turreted bell tower, and a porte cochère where parishioners were once dropped off by rickshaws and trishaws.

2 – Purvis Street (one-block street between Beach and North Bridge roads), once the heart of Singapore's Hainanese community, is lined with ornate pastel shophouses and some of Singapore's favorite eateries, both local and foreign. On the Beach Road corner, YY Kafei Dian usually has a queue snaking out the door for its famous Hainanese kaya toast (a thick bun slathered with kaya – aka coconut jam – and butter); a few doors down is the old school Chin Chin Eating House for traditional Hainanese chicken rice, considered Singapore's national dish. On the other end of the street, a row of pink shophouses with plaster flourishes, pilasters and street-level archways houses several established fine dining venues: Garibaldi for Italian, Gunther's for French, and Thai at the Yhingthai Palace.

3 – Raffles Hotel (Beach Road) wasn't always so grand; it started out as a rather humble private beach house in the 1830s. (And yes, Beach Road is so named because that was the original coastline of Singapore.) In the late 1880s, the 10-room property was leased to the Armenian Sarkies brothers who turned it into a luxury hotel, adding rooms and floors. The rest is history. Its prime sea-front location near town made it very popular with European residents and worldly travelers the likes of Somerset Maugham, Ruyard Kipling and Noel Coward, and in more recent years, Michael Jackson and many heads of state.

4 – Chijmes (corner of Victoria Street and Bras Basah Road) was formerly the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ), a mid-19th-century orphanage and Singapore's first Catholic girls' school. A tenacious group of conservationists put pressure on the government to preserve the complex, and it was declared a National Monument in 1990 along with the adjacent 1840-built Caldwell House, a Neo-Palladian bungalow that housed the convent in its early years. After extension renovations, Chijmes opened in 1996 as an atmospheric venue for bars

and restaurants set within the former convent's stone walls. In contrast to the booze swilling going on all around it, the crowning point of the complex has always been the lovely white-washed Gothic Chapel built in 1903 by a French priest and architect, with stained glass windows imported from Bruges, Belgium. Next door on Victoria Street is the huge Cathedral of the Good Shepard, dating back to 1847, with its neo-Palladian porticoes and prominent steeple.

5 – Singapore Art Museum (71 Bras Basah Road). This gorgeous whitewashed complex was a Catholic Boys School (St Joseph's Institution or SJI) from 1855 to 1990. Then the school relocated and the Singapore Art Museum moved in. The galleries in the Central Building were formed by knocking down walls that made up the classrooms, while other areas were restored and used for museum exhibits and activities, including the former gymnasium and chapel. Even if you're not all that interested in contemporary art, stop by for a bite to eat and have a look around – there are several cafes on site.

6 – Waterloo Street (between Bras Basah and Middle roads) is one of Singapore's oldest roads and originally called Church Street, after Thomas Church, a British administrator at the time. The name was changed to Waterloo Street in 1858 to commemorate the British victory at the Battle of Waterloo. It should be called Worship Street, if you consider how many religious buildings are along the two-block stretch. The small austere Middle Road Church, now an art gallery (6d), and the larger Church of Saints Peter and Paul (6a), were both built in the early 1870s. The Maghain Aboth Synagogue opened its doors in 1878 (6b), and around the same time, the Sri Krishna Temple (1870)(6e) and the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple (1884)(6f) were built. Waterloo is also home to several arts institutions housed in neat old pre-war bungalows, including the Singapore Calligraphy Centre (6c), whose mission it is to promote traditional Chinese brush writing.

POI – Artichoke Café & Bar (161 Middle Road) is a funky place for really good Middle Eastern fare. Their Facebook profile says it all: Middle Eastern/Dude Food/Loud Music/Chummy Service/No Pretentious Bullshit. Bon Appetite.

POI – Bugis Street (near the intersection of Victoria and Rochor streets) today is a closed-to-traffic shopping area that's stuffed with t-shirts, watches and other cheap souvenirs. But back in the 1950s up through the 80s, it was a notorious strip of street food sellers, cheap booze and parading transgender prostitutes. A nightly sex bazaar, including a famous public restroom rooftop where horny exhibitionists would do it in front of an audience, was a popular place for gawkers, tourists, sailors and anyone wanting to get laid.

ROCHOR CANAL TO BEACH ROAD (cont'd)

POI – Selegie Art Centre (30 Selegie Road) is a three-story triangular-shaped building with a rounded end at the convergence of Selegie Road and Prinsep streets. It looks like a mini pastel yellow version of New York City's famous wedge-shaped Flatiron Building, and is believed to date back to the 1930s. The second and third floors house the Photographic Society of Singapore, with coffee shops and other retails outlets on the ground floor.

POI – David Elias Building (corner of Short and Middle roads). In the 1920s wealthy Jewish merchant David Elias hired Singapore's distinguished Swan & MacLaren architects to design an office building for his import-export firm D.J. Elias and Company in the heart of the Jewish Quarter. Elias was from a prominent Baghdadi Jewish family who originally made their fortune in the opium trade. In more recent years, part of the building was operated as the "Su Sun Hotel," whose old signage remains just above a large bas-relief Star of David.

POI – Ellison Building (corner of Selegie and Rochor Canal roads). Romanian Jew Issac Ellison built the faded beauty in 1924 with rounded corners and pair of rooftop copulas. Note the pediment with a Star of David, building name and year founded. Back in its earliest days, colonial governors and other big wigs would go to the second floor balcony and roof to watch the Sunday horse races at the nearby race track (now Farrer Park). Though no longer the place to see and be seen, a joint called the Colonial Bistro Café on the first floor plays homage to the building's history.

POI – Park View Square (North Bridge road, between Ophir and Rochor roads) is a mammoth brown tombstone of an office tower built in 2002 by a Taiwanese tycoon and inspired by New York City's Art Deco Chanin Building from 1929. All manner of eccentricities lurk inside, from the bronze statues of famous historical figures posing in the courtyard to the grandiose Divine Wine Society lobby bar with its vaulted ceilings, art nouveau murals, and three-story-high wine chiller that requires a waitress called an angel to hook herself onto a pulley to fly up to retrieve bottles. Over the top is an understatement.