



## History

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, European nations began venturing out to sea in search of better trade routes and the exotic trade goods of the East. The first sea route to India was discovered by Vasco da Gama at the turn of the century. Trading posts and settlements were established and crucial ports and cities were occupied as the 16<sup>th</sup> century dawned. The Portuguese arrived in Malacca in 1511, followed by the Dutch and British in the years after.

Portugal was ultimately not the most powerful of the Eurasian interlopers who came into the region but it did have the unusual policy of encouraging a high degree of interaction with local populations, most notably through marriage with the female inhabitants of the many locals where it set up shop – a way of life not replicated by later European arrivals.

Their children, born of these mixed heritages, came to be known as ‘Eurasians’. They served as intermediaries between the local people and the Europeans, as well as played vital roles in the administration and garrison of the colonies as they were better able than the native people to communicate with and gain positions of trust as they shared similar religion and heritage with the European colonists.

The word ‘Eurasian’ was originally coined by the British during their rule in India, to refer to people born to a British and an Indian parent. Today, it generally refers to anyone of mixed European and Asian parentage. The Eurasians in Singapore can trace their origins to various trading ports in the region where Europeans have settled, including Malacca, Penang, Bencoolen, Goa, Ceylon and Macau.