



Singapura, the Lion City

(Singapore)

It is said that long, long ago, a prince in Palembang called Sang Nila Utama was bored. He decided to go hunting with his men. In the woods they saw a deer, but as he tried to shoot, it moved swiftly. The prince and his men followed, trying to catch it. The deer disappeared, but from the hill where it had led them, the prince had a good view of the surrounding islands.

Looking out into the distance, Sang Nila Utama saw an island that he had not seen before. It had sands that shimmered white on the beach. "What is that island?" he asked his men. "Temasek," they answered. "Let us go there!" said the prince.

As they sailed towards Temasek however, a storm arose. The wind blew hard and the waves rose higher and higher. The boat was battered and in danger of capsizing. To lighten the load and help keep it afloat, Sang Nila Utama's men began throwing overboard the cargo they carried. But still the storm grew fiercer. They tried throwing everything that they could possibly manage without. They knew their lives were more important. However, the boat continued to sink.

One of his trusted advisors said to Sang Nila Utama, "Throw your crown overboard! It is the heaviest thing left on board." Perhaps the advisor had remembered an old story that said that Sang Nila Utama was one of the descendants of the Sea King's daughter. When the prince threw his crown overboard, the storm abated and the seas were calm once again. So, they continued their journey.



When Sang Nila Utama and his men landed on the shores of Temasek, he caught sight of another animal, one that he had never seen before. It was magnificent with a black head, a white neck, and a red body. It looked deep into the prince's eyes. Then it disappeared from view.

"What is that animal?" he asked his men. No one really knew, but one of the ministers said, "I have heard that there is an animal that looks magnificent and regal like that. They call it singa or lion."

Sang Nila Utama liked what he saw of the island. It was time he had his own place to rule and he thought the sighting of the singa was an auspicious sign. "This is where I shall live," he said. "We shall call this place 'Singapura' or 'Lion City.' And that, they say, is how Singapore got its name!

Supplementary information

- **Sang Nila Utama** was a real-life prince from Palembang, a city in the ancient empire of Srivijaya, based on Sumatra Island in present-day Indonesia. As the story above suggests, Sang Nila Utama is celebrated for the founding of Singapura.
- **Temasek** was the name of an early city from which the state of Singapore originated.
- The term **singa** (lion) has roots in Sanskrit; while pura is derived from the original Sanskrit term puram for city.