

The Story of Tan Chee Sing



The Pioneer of Resort Style Living

Chapter 1

A Boy from Batu Pahat: The Yongchun Son Who Left School at Fifteen



On 10 May 1955, a baby boy was born into an ordinary family in Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaya. His parents named him Chee Sing, and the family traced its ancestral roots to Lunshan Village, Taocheng, Yongchun County, Fujian Province. That child would one day become known as Tan Sri Tan Chee Sing, the founder of Tropicana Corporation and the pioneer of the resort style residential concept in Malaysia.

Like countless Yongchun immigrants who journeyed to Nanyang, Tan Chee Sing's family had crossed the seas in the early twentieth century to seek a livelihood in Batu Pahat, Johor.

His father worked as a clerk for a lorry company, while his mother was a devoted Buddhist. Both parents placed great importance on traditional Chinese values and education, enrolling him in the local Chinese primary school. After graduating with excellent results, he entered Batu Pahat English High School, where he also obtained the Cambridge School Certificate.

However, at the age of fifteen, Tan Chee Sing was forced to leave school. With eight children in the family, his father's modest income could no longer support everyone's education. He entered the workforce at a young age and experienced the hardships of life at the grassroots. Yet those early struggles planted within him the determination to change his destiny. His command of both Chinese and English later became one of his greatest strengths in business. At the age of twenty, unwilling to settle for an ordinary life, he left for Kuala Lumpur on his own in search of greater opportunities. His first job was as a door to door encyclopedia salesman.

Chapter 2

Following His Brother's Footsteps: From Insurance to Automobile Dealerships

After arriving in Kuala Lumpur, Tan Chee Sing followed in the footsteps of his elder brother, Tan Sri Vincent Tan Chee Yioun, who was three years his senior. Together, they joined American International Assurance (AIA) as insurance agents. Vincent Tan would later become one of Malaysia's best known entrepreneurs, founding the Berjaya Group and introducing international brands such as McDonald's and 7-Eleven to Malaysia. Beginning their careers in the insurance industry, the two brothers gradually built valuable experience in sales while expanding their professional networks.

A few years later, the brothers turned their attention to the used vehicle market, initially focusing on the sale of Hino trucks and other heavy machinery before becoming authorised dealers for Toyota and Proton vehicles. This period in the automotive business gave Tan Chee Sing a solid understanding of the fundamentals of commerce, from pricing and negotiation to inventory management.

More importantly, he learned the essential principle of "buy low, sell high," a philosophy that would later underpin his bold acquisitions in the property sector.

In the early 1980s, Tan Chee Sing partnered with his brother to establish Indah Corporation Berhad, engaging in land transactions in Johor Bahru. When Vincent Tan secured a gaming licence in 1985, Tan Chee Sing also obtained the licence to operate slot machines throughout Malaysia. In addition, he acquired Kumpulan Aziztan, a company specialising in the refurbishment and trading of vehicles and machinery, enabling him to accumulate substantial capital for his future ventures.

Chapter 3

A Property Pioneer: UPC Court and the Birth of Resort Style Living

After accumulating capital through automobile dealerships and the machinery trade, Tan Chee Sing turned his attention to the property industry. He began by acquiring land in Johor Bahru, where he developed his first residential project, **UPC Court**. Although modest in scale, it marked his official entry into the world of property development.

The defining turning point came in 1992. At the age of thirty seven, Tan Chee Sing made a bold decision that would transform his future by acquiring a 625 acre tract of land in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. At the time, the site was little more than undeveloped wilderness, and few believed it held much potential.

Tan Chee Sing, however, envisioned something entirely different. He foresaw that as Kuala Lumpur continued to urbanise, the growing middle and upper income population would increasingly seek a higher quality of living. He introduced a concept that was remarkably ahead of its time: a residential community built around a resort lifestyle, where golf courses, landscaped gardens,

recreational facilities, and homes would be seamlessly integrated, allowing residents to "come home every day as though they were on holiday."

That visionary development became **Tropicana Golf & Country Resort**. In the same year, 1992, Tan Chee Sing established **Dijaya Corporation Berhad**, the predecessor of today's Tropicana Corporation, and successfully listed the company on the Main Board of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange.

In 1995, Tropicana Golf & Country Resort received the **FIABCI Malaysia Property Award for Best Leisure Development of the Year**, bringing both Tan Chee Sing and Dijaya Corporation into the national spotlight as rising leaders in Malaysia's property industry. Building on that success, he went on to acquire another 409 acre site to develop **Tropicana Indah Resort Homes**, further strengthening his reputation as the pioneer of resort style residential living in Malaysia.

Chapter 4

The Tropicana Era: From a Regional Brand to a National Property Giant

Under Tan Chee Sing's leadership, Dijaya Corporation entered a period of rapid expansion. The Group's total revenue grew from RM375 million in 2011 to RM1.64 billion in 2018. In 2013, he officially renamed the company **Tropicana Corporation Berhad**, strengthening the Tropicana brand and establishing it as a nationally recognised name in Malaysia's property sector.

That same year, the Group achieved sales of RM2.16 billion, an increase of approximately 124 percent compared with RM967 million recorded in 2012. From then on, Tropicana became an increasingly influential force in Malaysia's real estate landscape.

In 2015, Tropicana Corporation launched **The Residences and W Kuala Lumpur**, an upscale serviced residence and luxury hotel development in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. On 23 August 2018, **W Kuala Lumpur** officially opened its doors, becoming the first W Hotel in Malaysia.

By December 2018, Tropicana Corporation's total assets had reached RM8.09 billion. The Group held a land bank exceeding 3,504 acres with a projected gross development value of more than RM79.9 billion. Under Tan Chee Sing's stewardship, Tropicana had completed more than fifty developments while undertaking another fourteen projects, with business interests spanning residential, commercial, industrial, and digital transformation initiatives.

Chapter 5

Building Bridges: Advancing Malaysia–China Cooperation

Tan Chee Sing's achievements in the property sector also positioned Tropicana Corporation as an important bridge for collaboration between Malaysian and Chinese enterprises. On 20 June 2017, senior executives of CCCC Dredging met with Tan Chee Sing and his delegation. During the meeting, Tan noted that Tropicana Corporation had previously worked with CCCC Dredging on the reclamation works for the Lido Boulevard project in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, and expressed his hope that both parties could further deepen their partnership.

In October 2025, Tan Chee Sing met in Beijing with Shi Yingtao, Chairman of the Overseas Engineering Division of CCCC International. He introduced Tropicana Corporation's diversified portfolio, covering residential, commercial, industrial, and digital transformation projects, and expressed his hope that the two organisations could leverage their complementary expertise to strengthen cooperation and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes in building construction, industrial development, and new energy projects.

Chapter 6

At the Peak of Success: A Property Tycoon on the Forbes List

Tan Chee Sing's personal wealth grew alongside the expansion of his business empire. In 2015, he appeared on the **Nanyang Rich List** with an estimated fortune of RM1.043 billion. Thereafter, he became a regular on the **Forbes Malaysia Rich List**. He was ranked 29th in 2019 with a net worth of US\$700 million, remained 29th in 2022 with US\$590 million, ranked 34th in 2024 with US\$615 million, and 35th in 2025 with an estimated fortune of US\$650 million.

His accomplishments were equally recognised through numerous honours. In 2013, he received the **Lifetime Achievement Award** at the World Chinese Economic Forum, presented by Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister at the time. Three years later, at the **Malaysia Property Award** ceremony organised by FIABCI Malaysia, he was honoured with the **Property Man of the Year Award**, which was personally presented by His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim of Johor.

Chapter 7

Passing the Torch: Retirement and a Return to Leadership

Tan Chee Sing began planning the succession of the family business well in advance. In 2013, he stepped down as Chief Executive Officer and assumed the role of Executive Vice Chairman, entrusting the company's future development to the next generation. In 2015, he announced his retirement, with then Chief Executive Officer and his eldest son, Dato' Tan Yong Long, taking over the leadership of the Group. His third son, Tan Yong Chuan, joined the Board as an Executive Director, while another son, Tan Yong Kah, also served as an Executive Director. His daughter, Tan Suet Nee, had likewise been an Executive Director before stepping down from the Board following her father's retirement.

However, in 2019, Tan Chee Sing returned to Tropicana Corporation, once again assuming the position of Executive Vice Chairman. As of 2024, he held a direct stake of 19.23 percent and an indirect interest of 33.1 percent in the company.

Although he returned after retirement, he remained largely behind the scenes, providing strategic guidance while leaving the day to day management of the Group to the new generation of leaders.

DRAFT

Conclusion

Tan Chee Sing's story began in an ordinary Malaysian Chinese family in Batu Pahat and flourished in Kuala Lumpur's property landscape. From leaving for Kuala Lumpur alone at the age of twenty to founding Dijaya Corporation at thirty seven; from developing his first residential project, **UPC Court**, to pioneering Malaysia's resort style residential concept; from emerging as one of the country's leading property entrepreneurs on the **Forbes Malaysia Rich List** to receiving the **Property Man of the Year Award**, he spent more than three decades transforming the Tropicana name into one of Malaysia's most recognised property brands.

Along the way, he faced periods of ill health that required him to step back from business, and after announcing his retirement, he eventually returned to the Board. Through both triumphs and setbacks, he remained steadfast in viewing the Tropicana brand as his life's work. In 2026, as Tropicana Corporation continued to expand its footprint across Malaysia's property landscape, the Yongchun son from Batu Pahat remained the brand's most devoted guardian.

Primary References

- [1] Baidu Baike, *"Tan Chee Sing (陈志成)"*
- [2] Lianhe Zaobao, *"DAP Founding Member Tan Chee Sing Passes Away"*
- [3] eNanyang, *"Although He Passed the Business to the Second Generation, Tan Chee Sing Returned After Retirement"*
- [4] Guofu Consulting, *"CCCC International Meets with Tropicana Corporation's Tan Chee Sing of Malaysia"*
- [5] Sin Chew Daily, *"Dijaya Corporation Enters a New Era of Growth"*
- [6] *Encyclopedia of Overseas Chinese · Economy Volume*, Profile of **Tan Chee Sing** and **Tan Sri Vincent Tan Chee Yioun**
- [7] Business Digital (商海数码), *"Vincent Tan's Younger Brother Tan Chee Sing Sells W Hotel and Other Assets"*
- [8] Eastern International Property (東森國際地產), *"Is Tan Chee Sing Planning Tropicana Corporation's Next Move?"*
- [9] eNanyang, *"Tropicana Corporation Cultivates the Next Generation to Expand Its Business Empire"*

[10] eNanyang, *"Nanyang Rich List: Tan Chee Sing Retires After a Successful Career"*

DRAFT