

Singapore, Singapore



Airport: Singapore Changi Airport (SIN)
Served by: British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Finnair, JAL Japan Airlines, Qantas

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City Statistics



Location: Singapore state, Southeast Asia.

Dialling code: 65; but note: no city code, just eight digits to follow, always beginning with '6'.

Population: 4.84 million (including permanent residents and foreign workers).

Time zone: GMT + 8.

Electricity: 220-240 volts AC, 50Hz; square three-pin plugs, or two-pin with adapter.

Average January temperatures: 26°C (79°F).

Average July temperatures: 27°C (81°F).

Annual rainfall: 2,415mm (95 inches); rainy season Nov-Jan.

Overview



Singapore, known as the Lion City, is a fascinating blend of pan-Asian cultures, ethnicities and cuisines, exquisite natural beauty and fine British colonial architecture. Above all, it is a high-tech modern city where Asian traditions eagerly embrace both the benefits of global tourism and the challenges of tomorrow.

History

This tropical tip of the Malay Peninsula was settled in 1299 by a Malay Sultan, who built a palace at Bukit Larangan (now Fort Canning). Five centuries later, in 1819, globe-trotting adventurer Thomas Stamford Raffles claimed Singapore for the British East India Company, and the foundations of one of the world's most prosperous trading centres were established.

Fusion of cultures

The gleaming skyscrapers that tower over Singapore shield a plethora of Chinese and Hindu temples and Islamic mosques that stud this multicultural city, whose origins were defined by mass immigration from across Asia in the 19th century. A curious blend of ancient and modern, the city is home to an ethnic mix of Chinese, Malays and Indians, as well as expats from all over the world, in a predominantly English-speaking society.

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Modern Asian republic

Since becoming an independent Republic in 1965, Singapore has enjoyed a vigorous free trade policy, as introduced by its then Prime Minister (now Minister Mentor) Lee Kuan Yew. This led to an unprecedented rise in the standard of living and exponential economic growth. The economy and tourist industry have enjoyed robust health though Singapore's economy was dented between 2001 and 2003, during the global recession. It rebounded to grow steadily through the bullish early-21st century. Despite falling into recession in late 2008, many analysts believe Singapore is capable of rebounding once more.

World-class facilities

From its world-beating Changi Airport to its superb museums, tourism facilities, heritage architecture and natural attractions, Singapore is a beacon of efficiency, cleanliness and high-technology. Add in a constant flow of festivals and events in the ethnic quarters of Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam (traditionally the home of Singapore's Malay, Arab and Indonesian communities) and the result is one of Asia's most compelling tourism destinations, and one of the most diverse and delicious culinary scenes on the planet.

Getting There By Air



Singapore Changi Airport (SIN)

Tel: 6541 2107.

www.changiairport.com

Changi is located 20km (12.4 miles) from Singapore centre. It usually tops international polls as the world's best airport and is currently the 19th busiest. It also became home, in 2007, to the world's first in-service Airbus A380 aircraft, the world's largest passenger plane. A total of 81 scheduled airlines operate out of Changi, with almost 4,500 scheduled flights weekly to 188 cities in 60 countries worldwide, making it the airport with the most air links in the Asia Pacific region. To cater for continuing growth in passenger numbers, Budget Terminal (www.btsingapore.com), with low-cost airlines, became operational in 2006, in addition to Terminals 1, 2, and Terminal 3, which opened in 2008.

Approximate flight times to Singapore: From London is 13 hours; from New York and Los Angeles is now 18 hours non-stop (the world's longest flight), from Toronto is 20 hours and from Sydney is 8 hours.

Airport facilities: While Changi's legendary efficiency means travellers need spend the minimum amount of time in the airport, the facilities on offer mean that days could happily be spent there. In addition to a wealth of top shopping choices, there are showers, gym and sauna, rooftop pool and Jacuzzi (both at the airport's transit hotel), hairdressing salons, laundry service, karaoke lounge, movie theatre, TV lounges, children's play area, nursery, smoking room, medical centre and prayer room. To get back to nature there are even cactus, bamboo, sunflower and orchid gardens, and a Koi pond.

There are the usual banks, bureaux de change, ATMs, postal and telecommunications offices, shops, restaurants, car hire (*Avis* and *Hertz*), hotel reservation counters, tourist information, wheelchair rental services and baggage storage facilities. Transit and transfer passengers can also take advantage of a selection of free 2-hour themed guided coach tours of Singapore. At the small, new Budget Terminal (www.btsingapore.com), a short shuttle bus ride away, facilities are more basic with a few food kiosks and shops, but all the essentials including ATM, Internet and bureaux de change are there.

Business facilities: The comprehensive range of services includes transit hotels and business-class lounges. The JetQuay luxury business lounge can be used, for a fee, by passengers travelling on any class. Each transit hotel has a business centre, for typing and mailing of documents, plus a 24-hour service of photocopying and faxing (Terminal 1 tel: 6542 5538; Terminal 2 tel: 6542 8122). Free Internet corners are dotted around several locations in the Departure/Transit lounges in Terminals 1, 2 and 3, open 24 hours. Terminals 1, 2 and 3 have Wi-Fi Internet access throughout and Budget Terminal has free Internet and laptop access.



Transport to the city: The *MRT (Mass Rapid Transit)* has a station under Terminals 2 and 3, also accessible via the skytrain from Terminal 1 and shuttle bus from Budget Terminal. This is the quickest and cheapest way of getting into the city centre (changing at Tanah Merah station), with trains departing regularly throughout the day.

Singapore Bus Service (SBS Transit) (tel: 1 800 287 2727; www.sbstransit.com.sg) operates regular buses into the city, with terminals in the basement of Terminals 1, 2 and 3. Public buses (exact fare only) also depart regularly all day. Bus 36 goes along Orchard Road (journey time - 50 minutes).

Taxis are available 24 hours from the Arrivals Hall of all terminals, with journey time around 20-30 minutes between the airport and city centre. Taxi fares are between S\$18-30 to the city, plus toll and luggage fees. The six-seater *MaxiCab*, the airport shuttle service run by *CityCab* (tel: 6552 2222 (cash payment) or 6553 8888 (credit/charge card payment); www.citycab.com.sg), will go to almost every major hotel in Singapore. Book at the counters in the Arrivals Hall and pay the driver. It leaves from Terminals 1, 2 and 3, 24 hours a day. For more than three passengers, it is cheaper by taxi.

Getting Around



Public Transport: Public transport in Singapore is efficient, ultra-modern, clean, cheap and mostly air-conditioned. *TransitLink Hotline* (tel: 1 800 2255 663; www.transitlink.com.sg) is a one-stop number set up by all the major transport providers (bus, underground etc) to help co-ordinate people's transport needs (0800-1800 daily except public holidays).

The **train** system is operated by *Singapore Mass Rapid Transit* (tel: 1 800 336 8900; www.smrt.com.sg). *SMRT* runs two services: the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) and the Light Rapid Transit (LRT). The MRT system extends north-south and east-west with trains every 3 to 6 minutes. A new circular subway line, the Circle line (CCL), is currently under construction and should be completed by 2010. The LRT system runs from Bukit Panjang New Town to Choa Chu Kang and Fajar in the suburbs. Trains run every 3 to 5 minutes.

The **bus** system is operated by the *Singapore Bus Service (SBS)* (tel: 1 800 225 5663; www.sbstransit.com.sg) and *SMRT Buses* (tel: 1 800 336 8900; www.smrtbuses.com.sg), which run an extensive network of buses throughout the city all day long. In addition, *SBS* also runs a BusPlus service (tel: 6481 0166; www.busplus.com.sg), which operates during peak hours to shuttle passengers between residential areas and MRT stations or the Central Business District, and *SMRT Buses* operates the NightRider night service, with buses running on limited routes between the city centre and residential suburbs until around 0400.

Electronic Smart Cards, known as **ez-link cards** (www.ezlink.com.sg), may be used on any MRT, LRT or bus journey, and can be purchased and topped up from general ticketing machines at all MRT, LRT and bus stations, as well as online.

Taxis: Over 15,000 cheap, metered, safe and air-conditioned taxis ply the city, but their convenience and affordability means they are hard to find during peak hours, especially in the Central Business District (CBD), and during a downpour. Taxis can be hailed 24 hours a day on the street, as well as at well-marked stands outside most shopping centres and hotels. Fares vary slightly between companies, and are subject to a number of surcharges such as advance booking fees, toll fees and ERP (electronic road pricing in the CBD area) during peak hours or a pick up in the CBD. There is a 50% surcharge 0000-0600, and a S\$5 surcharge 1700-2400 Friday, Saturday or Sunday, and surcharges for driving along certain highways at certain times.

It is not customary to tip taxi drivers. Drivers changing shifts will only take passengers heading in their direction - the red board on the dashboard or windscreen indicates the destination. Although there is no longer a bell that rings if the taxi breaks the speed limit, most drivers adhere strictly to the 80kph (50mph) limit. Major taxi firms include *CityCab* and *Comfort* (tel: 6552 1111 www.cdgtaxi.com.sg), and *SMRT Taxis* (tel: 6369 0111; www.smrt.com.sg/taxis/taxis.asp).

Driving in the City: Singapore's highways are all designated by acronyms - AYE, ECP, CTE, AMK, PIE, ORR and CBD. Various tolls are levied in morning and evening peak hours to relieve congestion on expressways and busy roads, using the Electronic Road Pricing Scheme (ERP), which automatically deducts tolls from the

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In-vehicle Unit (IU). This is fitted in all Singaporean vehicles; drivers purchase a rechargeable CashCard and insert it in the IU. For vehicles that are not fitted with the IU, drivers may pay a fixed ERP fee, where S\$5 is deducted per day on passing an ERP gantry. This is paid together with the Vehicle Entry Permit (VEP) and toll charges via the Auto Pass card when departing Singapore.

This incredibly complex road-pricing system aims to help traffic flow in the Central Business District, with all vehicles entering between 0730 and 1900 also expected to pay a toll (depending on the location and time of day). Most rates have been reduced from February 2009 for cars (including taxis) fitted with the rechargeable CashCard technology. More information on the ERP is available from the *Land Transport Authority* (tel: 1 800 225 5582; www.lta.gov.sg).

The highways are easy to negotiate and traffic generally moves smoothly thanks to the ERP. Wearing seat belts in the front and back is mandatory and it is illegal to use a mobile phone while driving. Offences are treated seriously, with tough fines and even jail sentences. Singaporean drivers have a habit of lane drifting but otherwise traffic flows with very few abuses of etiquette.

Parking is cheap and easily available all over the city, especially in hotel basement car parks. Rates vary depending on location, management and timing but public car parks cost around S\$0.50 per half hour, double that inside the Central Business District. Some require parking coupons; others will take cash.

Car Hire: A valid national driving licence is required, although an International Driving Permit (IDP) is preferred and is mandatory where the driver's national licence is not in English. Drivers also require a passport and credit card to hire a car. Minimum third-party insurance is compulsory and can be extended to cover Malaysia. The minimum age limit for hiring a car is 25 years.

Major providers include *Avis* (tel: 6737 1668; www.avisworld.com) and *Hertz* (tel: 6734 4646; www.hertz.com).

Bicycle Hire: Cycling in Singapore tends to be restricted to public parks, with East Coast Park a popular venue for cyclists and rollerbladers. Bicycle hire is available at several outlets in the park, from about S\$1.50 per hour. Bicycles can also be hired at Sentosa, Pasir Ris and Bishan parks. The island of Pulau Ubin (see *Excursions*) has mountain bike facilities, with many hire shops near the jetty.

Hotels



Hotels

Hotel prices are subject to additional charges of 18%, broken down as 10% service charge, 7% GST (Goods and Services Tax) and 1% government tax, which is added to the bill (usually called 'triple plus').

Online reservations can be made at discounted rates for the top hotels at www.singaporehotels.com and the hotel reservation desks at all terminals in the airport also make bookings with discounted rates. Many hotels often have a promotion price at less than half the published price, usually via their own website, so it is always worth checking prices and booking ahead.

The hotels below have been classed into four different pricing categories:

\$\$\$\$ (over S\$500)

\$\$\$ (S\$300 to S\$500)

\$\$ (S\$200 to S\$299)

\$ (up to S\$200)

The prices quoted above are the published starting prices a double room per night, excluding breakfast and the above extra charges, unless otherwise specified.

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Raffles Hotel

A national monument, named after Singapore's founding father, Thomas Stamford Raffles, Raffles Hotel is a high point on the sightseeing trail (see Key Attractions). Still one of the world's most opulent, luxurious and award-winning hotels, it was restored in 1991 with an arcade added, containing shops and restaurants. Residents relive the past in one of its 103 high-ceilinged suites, many with their own veranda and parlour. Royalty, celebrities and writers all stayed here and homage is paid to them at every turn, particularly in the hotel museum. But it is also abundant in modern luxuries, like the Amrita Spa, swimming pool, business centre, nine meeting and function areas, florist, hotel arcade, boardrooms and its Jubilee Hall theatre. There are many options for drinking and dining, from the famous **Long Bar**, serving up Singapore Slings since the 1920s, and the adjacent **Long Bar Steakhouse**, to the contemporary New York-style **Seah Street Deli** and Oriental cuisine at **Doc Cheng's**.

1 Beach Road

Tel: 6337 1886.

Website: www.raffleshotel.com

Price: \$\$\$\$

The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore

This 32-floor high-rise has some of the best rooms on the island. Designed by prize-winning architect Kevin Roche, all 608 rooms (including the huge bathrooms) have panoramic views over the Singapore skyline or Marina Bay. The rooms, larger than in most other hotels, are stylish with light timber and Tibetan-style floor covering, and include broadband Internet access, multilingual voicemail and walk-in wardrobes. The top floor **Ritz-Carlton Club** has a lounge with a 360° view and cocktail bar. The hotel houses one of the largest collections of modern art in Southeast Asia, including works by Warhol and Chihuly, and offers the only Vintage Champagne Sunday Brunch in town. There are also seven acres of landscaped gardens surrounding the swimming pool.

7 Raffles Avenue

Tel: 6337 8888.

Website: www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Singapore

Price: \$\$\$\$

Moderate

Hotel 1929

As Chinatown's first HIP boutique hotel, Hotel 1929 has managed to combine designer cool with affordability in an unpretentious part of town. The winner of a host of prestigious awards and rave reviews, it comprises five colonial-era shop-houses that were conjoined to create this 32-room hotel. The result is funky, fresh and finely detailed. Each room is small but individually styled, with retro-style furniture, flat-screen TV, broadband Internet access and a designer shower. Guests can enjoy a rooftop bathtub - and the owner's private collection of designer chairs - or Jacuzzi on the second floor. The lobby area has free Wi-Fi Internet access. Added to that, Chinatown is rapidly becoming gentrified, with good nightspots in addition to its fabulous shopping. Room rate includes breakfast. Also check out their sister hotel **New Majestic Hotel** (www.newmajestichotel.com) with equally quirky designer kitsch.

50 Keong Saik Road

Tel: 6347 1929.

Website: www.hotel1929.com

Price: \$



Naumi

This rather sumptuous 40-room boutique hotel is superbly situated in downtown Singapore, near Raffles Hotel and Chijmes. Pronounced No-mi and named after the ninth day of the Hindu calendar, this chic property betrays many subtle and very cleverly understated Hindu design motifs. Dressed in almond tones, the rooms feature mostly contemporary comforts, including designer swivel armchairs, a large plasma TV, free Wi-Fi, Bose speakers, Nespresso coffee machine, complimentary Fiji water and fresh-cut flowers. The sixth floor is dedicated to female travellers. For relaxation, head to the rooftop bar and infinity swimming pool, and posit yourself in one of the extravagantly large 'pod-style' wicker poolside sofas.

41 Seah Street

Tel: 6403 6000.

Website: www.naumihotel.com

Price: \$\$

Other Recommendations

Gallery Hotel

The stylish Gallery Hotel adds some colour and energy to the business hub, thanks to its award-winning bright interiors and designer cool. Notable features include interactive doorway CCTV, free Wi-Fi Internet access in all rooms and executive women-only floors. The 221-room hotel consists of three blocks linked by bridges and open walkways, plus a fifth-floor cantilevered glass-sided pool overhanging the street. The red-, blue- and yellow-framed windows will appeal to anyone who enjoys a splash of colour, and there are art galleries on levels two and three. Facilities include multilingual voicemail and digital safes, in rooms immersed in bright furnishings and frosted glass bathrooms of polished marble. Larger rooms are available in The Glazzhaus (which even has extra long beds), with junior suites in The Observatory facing the river and king-sized beds in studio suites in the Executive Studio. The Gallery also houses a decent gym, Ayuthaya Spa, plus bars, clubs and restaurants. A great location on the river, it is a 20-minute walk to the nearest MRT station, Clarke Quay.

1 Nanson Road, Robertson Quay

Tel: 6849 8686.

Website: www.galleryhotel.com.sg

Price: \$\$

The Sentosa Resort & Spa

This luxury resort hotel is located on a cliff top overlooking the South China Sea, within 11 hectares (27 acres) of tropical woodland on Sentosa Island. Each room, decked out in soothing and stylish pale fabrics and dark wood, boasts a 42-inch plasma TV, plus advanced DVD player and high-speed Internet access. The hotel's 205 rooms include 27 suites, and four spacious garden villas, each with their private pool and garden. Business visitors are well catered for, with a two-storey conference centre containing meeting and function rooms. The luxurious *Spa Botanica*, Singapore's first tropical garden spa, is located in the grounds, with mud pools, steam baths, treatments and massages.

2 Bukit Manis Road, Sentosa

Tel: 6275 0331.

Website: www.beaufort.com.sg

Price: \$\$\$

Business Etiquette



English is the official language of business in Singapore and business is conducted very much on a Western model. However, Asian (and especially Chinese) business ethics often prevail. Most offices are

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designed (interior and exterior) in consultation with a *feng shui* expert, in order to create the most auspicious environment for generating wealth and harmony, and most feature a fish pond or fountain to ensure that money flows in the right direction. Business cards are exchanged on every social and business occasion and it is common courtesy to give or receive them with two hands (as with any piece of paper, including money). Corporate entertaining is high on the agenda and long lunches are often taken, with lavish buffets a popular option. Smoking is prohibited in many places and is not always socially acceptable, so visitors should check before lighting up.

There are 11 public holidays a year, the most significant being the Chinese New Year, usually in February. This is the only occasion when almost everything shuts down - locals spend time visiting their families and expats leave for a long weekend away. During other public holidays, like Christmas Day, banks and offices close but shops stay open.

Business dress is fairly formal, though a jacket is usually dispensed with apart from at official meetings. Women wear skirts or trouser suits. Some organisations have adopted casual Fridays, although only those departments with no client contact tend to take advantage of this.

Locals and expats alike work long hours. The official working day is 0900-1800 but much longer hours are quite common.

Sightseeing



Sightseeing Overview: Despite a lack of natural resources, Singapore has capitalised on the energy, enterprise and skills of its inhabitants to create something approaching a tourist mecca. Although most tourists only stop over for a couple of days in transit, many are beginning to stay longer and Singapore is determined to keep them, with a range of new attractions under construction, particularly around Marina Bay. **The Singapore Flyer**, the world's tallest Ferris wheel, opened here in 2008, and the giant **Marina Bay Sands** casino, hotel and entertainment resort is due to open in late 2009. Other new attractions include new **Botanic Gardens** south of Marina Bay and the **Marina Barrage** with its futuristic curving pedestrian bridge across the bay.

Singapore is a city where the first impression is that of man's achievements; the efficient and aesthetically pleasing Changi Airport is repeatedly voted the world's best. But here, world firsts are becoming commonplace, for example **Suntec City** boasts the biggest man-made fountain, the **Night Safari** is the first night zoo, and the world's highest man-made waterfall, at 30m (98ft), is at **Jurong Bird Park**.

Heat and humidity notwithstanding, the most efficient way to get to know local culture is on foot, particularly around **Chinatown**, **Little India** and **Kampong Glam** in the heart of the city. These areas especially illustrate how Singapore's successful economy is based upon ancient traditions, and multicultural influences. It is usually this combination that entices people, but for a healthy dose of pure consumerism and entirely modern architecture, Orchard Road is where the best shopping is at.

Singapore is not all urban landscape as first appears, and in keeping with its 'Garden City' label, there are many areas of natural beauty, albeit with a little help from humans. The **Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve**, **Singapore Zoological Gardens**, the Night Safari and **Bukit Timah Nature Reserve** are all hugely popular.

For history lovers and culture vultures, there is also an impressive selection of museums, exhibitions and architectural heritage, like the superb **National Museum of Singapore**, the **Asian Civilisations Museum**, **Peranakan Museum** and the **Singapore Art Museum**. New attractions include the **MINT Museum of Toys** and **Aramsa Garden Spa** for resting weary feet.

Tourist Information: Singapore Tourism Board (STB)

Orchard Road, at junction with Cairnhill Road

Tel: 1 800 736 2000.

Website: www.visitsingapore.com or www.stb.com.sg

Opening hours: 0930-2230 daily.

STB visitor centres can also be found at the following addresses: Changi, Arrivals Hall Terminals 1, 2 & 3, 0600-0200 daily, and Tourism Court, 1 Orchard Spring Lane, 0830-1830 Mon-Fri.

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Passes: The main pass in Singapore is the Electronic Smart Card known as **ez-link card** (www.ezlink.com.sg), which may be used on any MRT, LRT or bus journey, and can be purchased and topped up from general ticketing machines at all MRT, LRT and bus stations, as well as online.

Key Attractions



Raffles Hotel

Built in 1887 and declared a National Monument a century later, Singapore's most famous landmark is one of the world's greatest Victorian hotels. A favourite retreat for Somerset Maugham, Rudyard Kipling, Noel Coward and Charlie Chaplin, it oozes colonial grace, enhanced by its extensive facelift in 1991, which cost S\$160 million. Afternoon tea or a Tiffin Curry Buffet in the Tiffin Room, a Singapore Sling in the Long Bar and a drink under the cool high ceilings of the Bar & Billiard Room are all part of the Singapore experience. In addition, the stylish arcade contains shops, restaurants, a Victorian-style playhouse and a museum housing fascinating Raffles memorabilia.

1 Beach Road

Tel: 6337 1886.

Website: www.raffleshotel.com

Free admission.

Chinatown

Chinatown's history dates back to 1821 when the first Chinese junk carrying immigrants arrived from Fujian province. Much of it has been rebuilt and the colourful old shop-houses restored. It remains one of the most interesting areas to explore, with a lively street scene rich with traditional architecture and customs. The **Chinatown Heritage Centre**, 48 Pagoda Street (tel: 6325 2878, www.chinatownheritage.com.sg) showcases this fascinating historical story in full. Chinatown's four main districts all have their own distinctive flavour: Kreta Ayer (eating and shopping), Telok Ayer (temples and Speakers' Corner), Tanjong Pagar (nightlife and the scaled-down model of the city at *URA Gallery*) and Bukit Pasoh (Chinese cultural and clan associations). The lively paved Smith Street is known as Food Street, open 1700-2300 weekdays and 1700-0100 Friday, Saturday and the eve of public holidays, and is close to fantastic clothes and souvenir shops.

Little India

The streets of Little India, inhabited by the original Indian immigrants brought over by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819, has been a thriving commercial area for over a century. Today's attractions are mainly shopping, eating and temples, especially along the main hub of Serangoon Road, with spicy aromas emerging from shop-houses and wonderful Indian food to be devoured in the many informal restaurants. The **Little India Arcade** and **Zhujiao Centre** (also known as **Tekka Centre**) are newly converted shop-houses selling handicrafts, saris and spices, with more commercial wares at the 24-hour-open **Mustafa Centre**. During Hindu festivals, the area comes to life especially around the thriving temples.

Night Safari

The award-winning Night Safari is billed as the world's first night wildlife park. As 90% of animals are nocturnal, this safari shows animals at their most active by using clever lighting techniques. Spread over 40 hectares (100 acres) of lush forest, more than 1,000 animals, covering 100 exotic species, live in eight zones recreating geographic regions, including the African savannah and South American pampas. There are three walking trails, plus a 45-minute tram ride, cocktail safari express and limo buggy trail. The 'Creatures of the Night' show sees employees grappling with some of the less dangerous species.

180 Mandai Lake Road

Tel: 6269 3411 (24-hour information).

Website: www.nightsafari.com.sg

Opening hours: Daily 19.30-2400 (last admission 2300).

Admission charge.

Jurong Bird Park

The largest bird park in the Asia Pacific, covering over 20 hectares (50 acres), this is home to more than 9,000 birds from 600 different species worldwide. Highlights include *African Waterfall Aviary*, at 30m (98ft) the world's highest man-made waterfall; the *Penguin Exhibition*, with a panoramic viewing gallery to watch the 200 penguins feeding; the *Southeast Asian Birds Aviary*, where a thunderstorm is simulated every day at noon; the *African Wetlands Exhibit*; and *Jungle Jewels*, featuring dazzling hummingbirds. At the Lodge on Flamingo Lake, visitors can dine in a three-storey glass restaurant surrounded by 1,001 flamingos. An air-conditioned monorail covers the entire park.

2 Jurong Hill

Tel: 6265 0022.

Website: www.birdpark.com.sg

Opening hours: Daily 0830-1800.

Admission charge.

Singapore River

Once the lifeline of Singapore, and first port of call for its first immigrants, the river takes in many sights. **Boat Quay** and **Clarke Quay** have buzzing nightlife with lively waterfront bars and restaurants, while **Robertson Quay** is more refined and tranquil. **Parliament House**, originally a colonial mansion built in 1827 and now **The Arts House**, has been a venue for contemporary arts since 2004. Places of worship include **Tan Si Chong Su Temple**, an ancestral Hokkien temple built in 1876, and **Omar Kampong Melaka Mosque**. There are several riverboat services for leisurely cruises (see *Tours of the City*). Clarke Quay is also home to the stomach-churning **G-Max Reverse Bungy**. Singapore River is being further developed into a 24-hour waterfront precinct.

Singapore Art Museum

Transformed from a 19th-century boys' school built by Irish Catholic monks, this is one of Singapore's most striking structures. Now home to the Singapore Art Museum, its exhibits are predominantly 20th-century Southeast-Asian art, with paintings, sculptures and installations. Although specialising in regional art, the museum has recently broadened its field. Free guided tours in English are available.

71 Bras Basah Road

Tel: 6332 3222.

Website: www.nhb.gov.sg/sam

Opening hours: Sat-Thu 1000-1900; Fri 1000-2100.

Admission charge; free on Fri 1800-2100, weekends 1200-1400 and major public holidays.

National Museum of Singapore

Housed in a whitewashed Palladian mansion with a stunning contemporary glass adjunct at the back, this is simply one of the best history museums in Asia. The museum houses a superb, interactive Singapore-history exhibition that visitors can self-guide their way through using a hand-held PDA device, plus four permanent *Living Galleries*, detailing the histories of Food, Fashion, Film and Photography in Singapore, plus two cutting-edge temporary art galleries. The magnificent building itself is worth a visit, and there are also excellent fine-dining restaurants, cafes and an excellent museum shop.

93 Stamford Road

Tel: 6332 5642.

Website: www.nationalmuseum.sg

Daily 1000-1800, 1000-2000 (Living Galleries).

Admission charge (free admission to the Living Galleries 1800-2000 daily).

Singapore Cable Car

Spanning over 1,750m (5,740ft) and rising up to 93m (305ft) above sea level, this is Southeast Asia's first ever cable car. It stops at three stations (visitors can board at all three), each with beautiful, and very different,



views: Mount Faber is the second highest hill in Singapore and an equatorial rainforest; Cable Car Towers is the rooftop of a skyscraper, near the HarbourFront Centre and above the busy harbour; the third station is on the island of Sentosa. Some cars are glass-bottomed, making the journey even more spectacular. The Jewel Box atop Mount Faber is home to a suite of excellent restaurants overlooking the city.

109 Mount Faber Road, Cable Car Towers, 3 Maritime Square, or Sentosa Island

Tel: 6270 8855.

Website: www.mountfaber.com.sg

Operating hours: Daily 0830-2300.

Admission charge.

Asian Civilisations Museum

This intriguing museum housed in the restored Empress Place Building focuses on a broad and in-depth perspective of pan-Asian culture and civilisations. It houses 11 galleries containing over 1,300 artefacts from civilisations of China, Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Islamic societies of West Asia. Free guided tours in English are available. The location of the museum was once a government office and overlooks the mouth of the Singapore River.

1 Empress Place

Tel: 6332 2982.

Website: www.acm.org.sg

Opening hours: Mon 1300-1900, Tues-Sun 0900-1900 (until 2100 Fri).

Admission charge.

Peranakan Museum

Formerly an adjunct to the Asian Civilisations Museum, the Peranakan Museum reopened in 2008 in the magnificent former Tao Nan school building. The museum tells the fascinating stories of the mixed-culture Peranakan peoples of the former Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang and their links with other communities in Southeast Asia. The beautifully restored three-floored building houses stunning historical artefacts, ranging from wedding outfits to jade ornaments and exquisite hand-painted porcelain to religious icons.

39 Armenian Street

Tel: 6332 7591.

Website: www.peranakanmuseum.sg

Opening hours: Mon 1300-1900, Tues-Sun 0930-1900 (until 2100 Fri).

Admission charge.

Changi Chapel & Museum

A harrowing monument dedicated to the 50,000 soldiers and civilians who were killed during Japanese occupation (1942-45), Changi Chapel, a replica of many built at this time, is housed within the courtyard of the new museum. The museum contains letters, drawings and personal effects of the prisoners of war, with a replica of the Changi Murals and several video screenings. Services are held every Sunday from 0945 to 1100 in the chapel (visitors welcome).

1000 Upper Changi Road North

Tel: 6214 2451.

Website: www.changimuseum.com

Opening hours: Daily 0930-1700.

Free admission.

Singapore Botanic Gardens

As a perfect respite from the city's urban landscape, the gardens epitomise the island's luxuriant parks with a combination of primary jungle and elegantly laid-out flowerbeds and shrubs, serving to educate and conserve.

With over 3,000 species spread over 52 hectares (128 acres), the **National Orchid Garden** has the world's largest orchid display, with over 60,000 plants in total. The gardens are also a venue for outdoor concerts.

1 Cluny Road

Tel: 6471 7361.

Website: www.sbg.org.sg

Opening hours: Daily 0500-2400; daily 0830-1900 (National Orchid Garden).

Free admission; charge for the National Orchid Garden.

Sentosa Island

Billed as a 'tropical isle of peace and tranquillity', Sentosa Island is a purpose-built island theme park, with attractions including *Underwater World*, a huge tropical oceanarium with 2,500 marine creatures in an 83m (272ft) submerged tunnel; *Dolphin Lagoon*, a water show with a pink dolphin; and the 37m (121ft) *Merlion*. Museums include **Images of Singapore**, with waxwork figures depicting Singapore's history, and **Fort Siloso**, recreating bunkers and underground passages used for defence during the war. The viewing platform at the top of **Tiger Sky Tower** offers a great panoramic view of Singapore, gently revolving at 131m (430ft) above sea level. Meanwhile, **Sentosa 4D Magix** is Singapore's first and Southeast Asia's largest cinema of its kind, and boasts state-of-the-art projection technology and sound system. The **Sijori WonderGolf** is an 18-hole miniature golf course, certified by the Minigolf Sport Federation. Beaches, golf courses, hotels, entertainment and restaurants are dotted throughout Sentosa, and a giant new casino and integrated resort is also under construction. A lightrail and bus tour the island and visitors can jump off at any station.

Tel: 1 800 736 8672.

Website: www.sentosa.com.sg

Opening hours: Attractions vary; usually daily 0900-1900 (or as late as 2200).

Admission charge.

Singapore Flyer

This enormous Ferris wheel, towering above Singapore, offers panoramic views across the Marina Bay, downtown skyscrapers and the city beyond. Standing at 165m (541ft), the graceful curve described against the Singapore skyline, artfully lit at night, is an attraction in itself. A ride in one of the wheel's 28 pods will take just over 30 minutes, and there are in-capsule guided tours of the sights below and beyond.

30 Raffles Avenue

Tel: 6333 3311.

Website: www.singaporeflyer.com.sg

Opening hours: Daily 0830-1030.

Admission charge.

Former Supreme Court and City Hall

These two supremely photogenic buildings sit in the heart of Singapore's Civic District, opposite the old 'Padang' sports field. Dating from 1939, the Supreme Court is one of the finest buildings from British Rule in Singapore, with a striking green dome modelled on St Paul's Cathedral in London and impressive Italian murals. The adjacent City Hall, built in 1929 and lined with 18 Corinthian columns, was the site of the Japanese surrender to Lord Mountbatten in 1945 and also where Singapore's Independence from Malaysia was declared. The interiors are currently being refurbished as the buildings will jointly reopen in 2013 as the **National Art Gallery**.

1 Supreme Court Lane

Culture

Despite its ultra-modern, futuristic facade, the influences of pan-Asian cultures and religions remain entwined in Singapore. Throughout the year, a constant stream of festivals and celebrations in the streets and temples





reflects the diverse beliefs and backgrounds of this multicultural society, comprising of Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Sikhs. The Chinese calendar dominates and the Chinese New Year (in February) is the biggest festival of all, where pretty much everything shuts down for several days.

The city's art scene reflects the flavours of the region, with Malay, Chinese and Indian performances, art and music. Mainstream performing arts are also well represented, culminating in the Singapore Arts Festival (www.singaporeartsfest.com) held every June, which attracts international dance, theatre and music groups. Performers from overseas tend to be heavily oversubscribed and tickets should be booked well in advance; local performers are easier to see. Popular events also include local productions of Broadway hits. Free musical and theatrical performances are held regularly in local parks.

Singapore is a good place to view and purchase local and Asian art and its cultural diversity means that local artists cover a broad palette of themes and styles. The city now hosts the annual Art Singapore Fair (www.artsingapore.net) each October for international collectors and artists. Among the notable galleries is the **Singapore Art Museum**, Bras Basah Road (tel: 6332 3222; www.nhb.gov.sg) and **The Substation**, Armenian Street (tel: 6337 7535; www.substation.org) specialises in contemporary works and installations. Both **Gajah Gallery** (www.gajahgallery.com) at the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts, MICA Building, 140 Hill Street, and **Red Sea Gallery** (Block 9, 01-10/11 Dempsey Road, tel: 6732-6711, www.redseagallery.com) show exciting contemporary works from Southeast Asian artists. A full list of independent and commercial art galleries is available from the Art Galleries Association (tel: 6235 4113; www.agas.org.sg) and from their member galleries.

Local newspapers (such as the *Straits Times*) carry lists of daily events. *Time Out Singapore* is the leading monthly magazine for city listings and information and is sold in all bookstores. *I-S Magazine* is a free publication with good listings and reviews for exhibitions, dance, art and music. Additional information can be obtained from the **National Arts Council** (tel: 6746 4622; www.nac.gov.sg) or through the Singapore Tourism Board (see *Sightseeing*). Tickets can be booked through *Sistic* (tel: 6348 5555; www.sistic.com.sg) or *Ticketcharge* (tel: 6296 2929; www.ticketcharge.com.my).

Music: The **Singapore Symphony Orchestra** (tel: 6348 5555; www.sso.org.sg) gives regular performances including every Friday, Saturday and some Sundays at the **Victoria Concert Hall**, Empress Place (tel: 6338 6125; www.vch.org.sg), and at its home, the **Esplanade Concert Hall** (tel: 6828 8222; www.esplanade.com) as well as open-air concerts. Founded in 1979, the SSO bridges Asian and Western music and has a growing, if still fragile, reputation helped by the occasional international tour.

The **Chinese Opera** is performed at the **China Theatre Circle** in Chinatown (tel: 6323 4862; www.ctcopera.com.sg). **Singapore Lyric Opera**, 155 Waterloo Street (tel: 6336 1929; www.singaporeopera.com.sg) usually performs Western classical pieces, occasionally fusion, at assorted venues. The National Arts Council (tel: 6746 4622; www.nac.gov.sg) organises alfresco concerts by local arts companies in parks. For a truly local experience, a *Wayang* is a Chinese Opera, usually in Mandarin. These highly elaborate performances are most often held during August and September during the Hungry Ghost Festival.

Theatre: Local groups are extremely energetic in producing contemporary theatre with an Asian flavour, reflecting Singapore's ethnic diversity. Showcasing young local and international talent is the annual Singapore Fringe (www.singaporefringe.com), spread across various venues in the city. The largest multi-purpose venue for performing arts, The Esplanade - **Theatres on the Bay**, 1 Esplanade Drive (tel: 6828 8222; www.esplanade.com), is a waterfront complex containing a concert hall, recital studio, two theatres, an art gallery and a bay-side outdoor stage. Plays are often performed in Mandarin, with English subtitles. Some of the more prolific theatre companies include: **Singapore Repertory Theatre** (tel: 6221 5585; www.srt.com.sg), showcasing at the **DBS Arts Centre**, 20 Merbau Road (tel: 6733 8166); **TheatreWorks**, 72/13 Mohammed Sultan Road (tel: 6737 7213; www.theatreworks.org.sg) has both a Singapore Wing and an International Wing and develops its two strands; and feisty **Wild Rice** (tel: 6292 2695; www.wildrice.com.sg). The Substation, 45 Armenian Street (tel: 6337 7535; www.substation.org), shows modern, experimental drama.

Dance: Ecnad Project (tel: 6226 6772; www.ecnad.org) is a young, professional performing arts group going strong for over a decade, renowned for its cutting-edge, dynamic performances. Its base is at the **Telok Ayer**

Performing Arts Centre, 182 Cecil Street (tel: 6221 4726). The **Singapore Dance Theatre** (tel: 6338 0611; www.singaporedancetheatre.com) performs classical dance and ballet and is based at **Fort Canning Centre**, Cox Terrace, Canning Park. One of the city's most popular events is their outdoor *Ballet Under the Stars*, held at Fort Canning Hill in July.

Film: The annual Singapore International Film Festival in April (www.filmfest.org.sg) features documentaries and films from around the globe, in addition to other foreign film festivals throughout the year. Cinematheque at the Gallery Theatre in the **National Museum of Singapore** (tel: 6332 3659; www.nationalmuseum.sg) is a monthly screening of inventive and largely unheralded films from around the world. Sinema Old School (#B1-12, 11b Mount Sophia; tel: 6336 9707; www.sinema.sg/oldschool) is a 130-seat high-definition cinema in a former school lecture theatre that shows a popular range of home-grown Singaporean movies and short films.

Singapore's main cinemas for English language films include **Cathay Orchard**, 8 Grange Road, and **Cathay Causeway Point**, 1 Woodlands Square (tel: 6235 1155; www.cathay.com.sg); **Lido Cineplex**, Shaw House, 350 Orchard Road; **Bugis**, Parco Bugis Junction; **Balastier**, Shaw Plaza, 360 Balastier Road, **Prince/Jade**, Shaw Tower, 100 Beach Road (all at tel: 6738 0555; www.shaw.com.sg); and **Golden Village**, 68 Orchard Road (booking hotline tel: 1 900 912 1234; info 6334 3766; www.gv.com.sg).

Literary Notes: 'When in Singapore, feed at Raffles.' It was a good piece of marketing for the hotel by Rudyard Kipling, who came to Singapore after leaving India in 1889. In fact, Kipling spoke of 'a place called Raffles Hotel, where the food is as excellent as the rooms are bad'.

Raffles has, for over a century, been fertile writing ground for many authors, including Hermann Hesse, Joseph Conrad, Noel Coward, Somerset Maugham and James Michener - and in their honour, the Writer's Bar was named. More than any other, Somerset Maugham sought inspiration on several visits to the island. His short stories of Singaporean colonial life include *The Outstation*, *Yellow Streak*, *The Casuarina Tree* (1926), and the controversial *The Letter* (1927), about the real-life murder of her lover by a rubber planter's wife.

More recently, Singapore's story is told through the man mainly responsible for its success; the former Prime Minister and now Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, grandson of a Hakka coolie from China. His memoirs *From Third World to First - The Singapore Story: 1965-2000* (2000) recount the events leading up to Singapore's Independence, from British colonial rule through Japanese occupation and Communist insurrection. *Defending the Lion City* (2000) by Tim Huxley is the first ever major study of the Singapore Armed Forces and analyses its military strategy, outlook and policies.

Prominent contemporary Singaporean novelists include Hwee Hwee Tan, whose *Foreign Bodies: A Novel* (1999) tells of an authoritarian state in which three rootless friends become implicated in an international soccer gambling syndicate. *Mammon Inc.* (2001), her latest novel, is a cutting satire of our times. A very different Singapore is portrayed in Catherine Lim's *The Bondmaid* (1997), set in the 1950s, which paints a picture of a Singapore entwined with its Chinese roots, traditions and beliefs. Two popular recent reads are *Got Singapore* (2002), a collection of articles and stories by journalist Richard Lim, with a personal and humorous testimony about his experiences from the 1960s to the 1980s. In *Notes from an Even Smaller Island* (2002), Neil Humphreys's rather lightweight humour, as displayed in books like *Scribbles from the Same Island*, dissects the culture and lifestyle of Singapore from a Dagenham-born expat's viewpoint. Set in Singapore during WWII, *The Singapore Grip* by JG Farrell (2005) tells of a city under siege, and the trials and tribulations of the very British and powerful Walter Blackett. This is the final novel in Farrell's 'Empire Trilogy'.

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