

DESTINATION ASIA

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT FOR ASIA'S TRAVEL CONNOISSEURS



SINGAPORE

COUNTRY FACT SHEET



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ABOUT SINGAPORE

Small in size but huge in opportunities, Singapore is one of the world's most dynamic countries. It offers a mosaic of contrasting cultures, diverse cuisines, superb shopping and a vibrant nightlife scene. Founded as a British trading colony in 1819, it has since developed into one of the world's most prosperous nations. The country's strategic location in the region, along important shipping routes, has made its sea port one of the busiest in the world. It is made up of 63 islands, and is separated from Malaysia by the Straits of Johor to the north and from Indonesia's Riau Islands by the Singapore Strait to the south.

Visitors can experience a mixture of Malay, Chinese, Indian and colonial influences in districts such as Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India. Apart from its rich cultural heritage, Singapore has one of the most modern city centers in the world with an abundance of shopping options in landmark areas such as the iconic Orchard Road, Marina Square, Suntec City and Raffles City. The latest dining and entertainment choices are available at Clarke Quay, Boat Quay, the Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa integrated resort complexes and Sentosa Island. Singapore has been a bridge between the East and the West for centuries and it is now one of Asia's most important business and leisure destinations.

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AIRPORTS

Known as Changi Airport, the island's airport is a major aviation hub in South East Asia. It is located 20-km from the city center and has three passenger terminals with a total annual handling capacity of 66 million passengers. The airport has been bestowed with a plethora of awards for its top-rate facilities which include a Balinese-themed swimming pool, gardens, free Wi-Fi and Internet terminals, free city tours, movie theaters, children's playgrounds and a gymnasium. The terminals are connected by a free Skytrain monorail.

ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Most foreigners entering Singapore do not require a visa for entry and are given a stamp to stay up to 30 days on arrival. However, please consult your local consular office for the latest information with regard to entry regulations for differing nationalities. Visitors who would like to stay in Singapore for a longer period may apply to the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) upon arrival. Travelers should have a valid passport with at least six months validity and onward or return tickets to the next destination, plus sufficient funds for their stay in Singapore. Entry visas are required for visitors from Afghanistan, Algeria, Cambodia, Egypt, India, Iraq, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Vietnam and Yemen. As regulations may change from time to time, please check with your nearest Singapore Embassy before departure. A full list of countries whose nationals require a visa to enter Singapore may be found on the ICA's website at http://www.ica.gov.sg/services_centre_overview.aspx?pageid=252

"All the above information may change without prior notice. It remains the traveler's responsibility to check visa requirements before traveling."

BUSINESS HOURS

Offices are generally open on weekdays from 9-am or 9.30-am to 5-pm or 5.30-pm; some are also open on Saturday morning.

BANKS

Banks and hotels can change money and most shopping complexes have a licensed money changer. It is advisable not to change money with an unlicensed operator. Most banks are open from 9.30-am to 3-pm on weekdays and 9.30-am to 11.30-am on Saturdays.

CLOTHING

Singapore's tropical weather makes light summer clothing (preferably of natural fabrics) the most practical, especially for outdoor activities such as sightseeing. Most restaurants and nightspots are not restrictive on the dress code: polo shirts, t-shirts, jeans, slacks, blouses, skirts, sundresses and sports shoes are acceptable at most venues.

CURRENCY

The local currency is the Singapore dollar. Other than the Singapore dollar, the United States and Australian dollars, Japanese yen and British pound are also widely accepted in most shopping centres and big departmental stores. Hotels, retailers, restaurants, travel agents and most taxis accept international credit cards.

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CUSTOM ALLOWANCES

If you are 18 years old or above and are arriving from a country other than Malaysia, you may use one of the following duty-free concessions for personal consumption:

- One liter of spirits;
- One liter of wine or port;
- One liter of beer, stout or ale.

SINGAPORE (DOS AND DON'TS)

DOS IN SINGAPORE

- If invited for dinner by Chinese friends or business acquaintances, leave some food on your plate to indicate your appreciation of your host's generosity.
- Hindus are often vegetarian, Muslims do not eat pork and must abide by strict food preparation guidelines and some Chinese may be devout Buddhist vegetarians. Therefore, check on dietary preferences before dining with multicultural company when in Singapore.
- Offer business cards with both hands with the card facing the recipient. Likewise, when a card is offered to you, accept it with both hands and make it a point to read the card. This shows respect for the person's title and position.

DON'TS IN SINGAPORE

- Don't use your left hand for greeting, gesturing, giving something to, or eating with a Malay, Indonesian, or Indian person.
- Refrain from kissing or touching the opposite sex, as some communities may be offended.
- At a formal meal, rice will often be served among the final dishes rather than at the same time as the meat and vegetable dishes. Do not pile your plate full of rice at the end of the meal. Your hosts may think that they didn't provide you with enough food.
- It is mandatory that you remove your footwear in places of worship. You should cover up your arms and legs in mosques and Hindu temples. For women, a head covering is usual.
- Use extreme caution when visiting mosques, perhaps seeking the permission of locals or the nearest person in authority to enter, and then ask where you may walk and what you may do. There may be areas where you are not permitted to go, particularly if you are a woman.
- Do not litter: it is against the law and you can be fined up to S\$1,000.
- Chewing gum stuck in train doors was blamed for the shutdown of the subway system more than ten years ago and as a result the government banned it from being sold in Singapore.
- Smoking is not permitted in public service vehicles or in most buildings. Those who break the regulation can be fined up to S\$1,000 for smoking in prohibited areas. Most restaurants and some bars have outdoor terrace areas for smokers.
- Do not publicly criticize Singapore, its politics, or its leaders, and refrain from jokes about them unless you are sure of your company – Singaporeans can joke all they want, but you're an outsider and a guest.

ELECTRICITY

Singapore's voltage is 220-240 volts AC, 50 Hz. Most hotels can provide visitors with an adapter which can convert the voltage to 110-120 volts AC, 60 Hz. The power plugs used in Singapore are of the three-pin British, square-shaped type.

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ENTERTAINMENT AND NIGHTLIFE

Spectacular views from towering skyscrapers, the luxurious clubs of Marina Bay and the cheap and character-filled outdoor plazas of Bugis Village all make Singapore one of Asia's most exciting cities for nightlife revelers. Most of Singapore's nightlife is concentrated around the Singapore River – a large waterway that cuts through central Singapore. Situated between the Bugis and Orchard areas is Clarke Quay, one of Singapore's most renowned nightspot destinations. Further up the river, lies Robertson Quay, another major nightlife locale with a different vibe. Other nightlife areas that are within walking distance include Boat Quay, a smaller nightlife center that is located slightly further up the river, and Circular Road, a small street that is a short walk from Boat Quay. For a more laid back experience that is still close to the river, try walking away from Robertson Quay to Mohamed Sultan Road, a district which is home to an abundance of traditional pubs and bars.

FOOD

Singapore's cosmopolitan blend of cultural influences is reflected in its ethnically diverse cuisine and the choice is vast; ranging from cheap and cheerful food sold at hawker stalls; to high-end cuisine served atop the best five-star skyscraper hotels. Singapore can justifiably claim to be Asia's food capital where East meets West in a dizzying mélange of flavors. A culinary journey of discovery can be had by visiting Chinatown, Little India and the city's Western-style eateries. "Must have" dishes include spicy chilli crab, Hainanese chicken rice, satay, laksa and char kway teow.

HEALTH

No inoculations or vaccinations are required unless traveling from, or passing through, areas infected with yellow fever. The standard of medical facilities at private hospitals is world class.

HOTEL INFORMATION

The standards of accommodation are excellent with categories to fit all budgets. Sentosa Island has large resorts that are close to the city, with the added bonus of facilities one would find at beach side hotels worldwide. The larger hotels offer a wide variety of restaurants, bars, swimming pools and other recreational facilities. During check-in you will be asked to complete a registration card. The hotel will also ask for an imprint of your credit card as a guarantee for extra services such as meals, drinks, etc. Ask the cashier to return this slip upon checkout. Please check that you receive meal coupons (where applicable) when given the room key. Generally check-in time is from 3-pm and check out time is 12-noon. If you require a late check-out (extra costs may apply) please check with reception beforehand.

INSURANCE

It is advisable to take out a medical insurance policy before traveling as treatment will not be administered without proof of payment, or evidence of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. Singapore's medical facilities are among the finest in the world. Pharmaceuticals are available from numerous outlets including supermarkets, department stores, shopping centers and hotels. Most hotels have their own doctors on call 24-hours.

INTERNET

Major hotels offer both Wi-Fi access and business centres with timed computer use and free Wi-Fi in lobby areas. Charges may apply in-room. Cyber cafes are also plentiful with pre-paid international phone cards to make international calls.

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LANGUAGE

There are four official languages in Singapore: Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English. English is the language of business and administration and is widely spoken and understood. Most Singaporeans are bilingual, and speak their mother tongue as well as English.

PEOPLE

One of the more remarkable aspects of Singapore is the truly cosmopolitan nature of the country's population – a natural result of the country's geographical position and commercial success. Established by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles as a trading post on 29 January 1819, the small fishing village of Singapore soon attracted migrants and merchants from China, the Indian sub-continent, Indonesia, the Malay Peninsula and the Middle East. At the last census, ethnic Chinese formed 74.2 per cent of the 5.2 million population, with the country's original inhabitant, the Malays, comprising 13.3 per cent. The Indians made up 9.2 per cent and Eurasians and Asians of different origins made up a combined 3.3 per cent.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

The 11 major public holidays in Singapore reflect the cultural and religious diversity of the country. These include Chinese New Year; the Buddhist celebrates Vesak Day; the Muslim holidays Hari Raya Puasa and Hari Raya Haji; the Hindu celebrates Deepavali; and the Christian holidays Good Friday and Christmas Day. Closure of tourist sites can occur at short notice on public holidays and our Destination Asia guides will give guests advice about this situation.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Singapore's efficient transport system – bus, taxi and MRT – ensures that visitors can get to any destination within the island with the minimum fuss. The Changi Airport Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station enables visitors to travel conveniently to and from the airport to destinations all over the island. Taxis are also abundantly available from the airport to the city center. There is a surcharge for all taxi journeys commencing from the airport and during morning and evening peak periods and after-midnight rides. The rates are displayed in each taxi. SBS Transit is Singapore's major bus service operator with 250 bus services and a fleet of 3,000 buses. The Singapore Tourism Board has introduced an innovative new system of river taxis that pick up and drop off passengers at 16 jetties along the Singapore River. The river taxis are air-conditioned, run every five minutes, and operate from 8-am to 11.30-pm. Destination Asia provides highly efficient airport transfers and transport to the island's major tourism destinations in modern vehicles accompanied by a licensed guide.

RELIGION

Religion is a fundamental component which binds together cosmopolitan Singapore. The leading religions such as Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism flourish in harmony with one another. The most prominent religion is Buddhism, with 33 per cent of the resident population listed as adherents of this faith. The majority of Malays are followers of Islam, with an added substantial community of Indian Muslims. Mixed-race school instruction has helped to foster interaction between students different ethnic backgrounds and the celebration of religious festivals has also helped to instil religious tolerance and understanding from a very young age. This religious enlightenment is evident in the physical sense on the streets of Singapore through the abundance of Hindu temples, Islamic mosques and Christian churches. This characteristic provides a tourism opportunity with a wealth of religious history available through interesting heritage trails that span the world's great religions – all in the space of a short walk.

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SAFETY

Singapore is one of the safest countries to visit and crimes against foreigners are very rare but travelers should remain vigilant for petty theft, especially in areas off the beaten tourist track. As a global rule, never leave belongings unattended and always maintain a firm grip on cameras and shoulder bags. Leave expensive jewelry at home and always use hotel safety deposits boxes or in-room safes for valuables.

SHOPPING

Shopping is like a religion in the island state! Singapore is blessed with boutique shops, sprawling malls and street markets selling an array of consumer goods and merchandise. Singapore is known as THE shopping center of Asia and a constant stream of tourists head to the island from neighboring countries and even further afield for the sole purpose of retail therapy. Orchard Road is the best place to start with its endless selection of modern malls. Visitors will also find specialty stores and street markets dotted across the island. Chinatown and Little India provide a colorful and exciting shopping experience with markets and family shops selling unique ethnic goods.

TELEPHONE

Most hotels have IDD phones but for a more inexpensive option head to the abundance of Internet cafes for cheaper phone rates and the sale of pre-paid international calling cards.

TIME ZONE

Singapore is GMT + 8 and does not operate on a daylight-savings system.

TIPPING

Tipping is not compulsory of life in Singapore. It is generally discouraged in hotels and restaurants where there is a 10 per cent service charge already imposed. Tipping the guide and driver on your transfers and tours should depend on how satisfied you are with the excursion.

WATER

Singapore water is clean and safe to drink from the tap and need not be boiled.

WEATHER

Singapore is known for its hot and humid weather, with little variation throughout the year. The average daytime temperature is 31°C (88°F), dropping to around 24°C (75°F) in the evenings. The monsoon season can be pretty heavy from November onwards, so be prepared for rain on a daily basis during this period. The wettest months are November to January and the driest May to July.

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EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

Police dial 999; Emergency Medical Services dial 995; Fire service dial 995.

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