



Wonderful food: satay chicken and prawns with sambal chilli



Chinatown: still full of tradition, even in this modern city



Getting around: rickshaw traffic in Little India

Singapore is clean, safe and efficient, and above all, it offers fantastic food

When flying to or from China, Indonesia, Australia or New Zealand, the island city-state of Singapore is a great place to stop and spend a few days. This is especially true if you're on the way home from some hard travelling in a less-developed country. Singapore is clean, safe and efficient, and above all, it offers fantastic food.

Tall glass towers and first-class hotels have replaced the thick tropical jungle that once covered this region. Prosperity has led to the development of Disneyland-like theme parks, beautiful public gardens, shopping centres and zoos. Unlike in nearby Malaysia or Indonesia, there's little chance of seeing wildlife in a natural habitat; in Singapore, encounters with animals are organized and guaranteed.

On arrival, I quickly make it through Singapore's smart Changi Airport and ride into town on the MRT (mass rapid transit) city train. It's by far the cleanest train I've ever travelled on. The fines for littering, smoking, eating and drinking in MRT stations and on board trains and buses are heavy, but they work really well.

Singapore has certainly come far from its beginnings as a British trading colony in 1819. Since gaining independence in 1965, this island of five million has become one of the world's wealthiest nations, as measured per capita.

For a first look at what's here, I take a boat tour along the Singapore River. Boat Quay on the south bank and Clarke Quay, further upriver, were once busy ports, but except for some restored old shop buildings, you'd hardly know it today. The area has been developed for promenading and riverside dining. Overshadowed by skyscrapers, the lively bars are popular with both locals and visitors. One of the best-known is Harry's Bar, a favourite of invest-

ment trader Nick Leeson, whose speculation caused the collapse of Britain's oldest investment bank in the 1990s.

At the mouth of the river stands a large, water-spouting statue. This "Merlion" — half lion, half fish — is the symbol of Singapore. In the 13th century, a Sumatran prince visited the island and saw an animal thought to be a lion. This good omen inspired him to build a city, Singapura, which in the Malay language means "Lion City". The Merlion's fish half represents Singapore's location on the sea.

Not far from the Merlion, the statue of Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of modern Singapore, stands on the spot where he first stepped on to the island in 1819. Raffles not only secured ownership of the area for Britain; he also planned the town with individual ethnic quarters. These divisions exist today: Little India, Chinatown and the area around Arab Street each has its own identity.

In Little India, people socialize on the street and share gossip outside temples. This is a place for wandering around and enjoying the atmosphere, including the strong smells of cooking and spices. Little India arcade is a charming area, where a variety of shops sell silverware, woodcarvings, silk saris and spices, and also offer fortune-telling. Not surprisingly, Little India has excellent food. One popular dish is fish-head curry — with the eyes still in the head — served on a banana leaf.

Temples, restaurants, and shopping centres are where you'll find the activity in Chinatown. South Bridge Road is where gold and jade shops and markets for traditional Chinese medicine are located. The nearby Temple of Heavenly Happiness is the most colourful in Chinatown. When worshippers gather there, the smell of incense fills the air and rises toward the dragons decorating the rooftop.

Today, three quarters of the population are Chinese. The rest are the original Malay people, and Indians who came here in the 19th century to work on plantations. Not surprisingly, Singapore has four official languages: Mandarin, Malay, Tamil and English. With such influences, Singaporean English, or "Singlish", has a personality all its

charcoal burner	['tʃɑ:kəʊl ,bɜ:nə]	Holzkohlegrill
clip sth.	[klɪp]	etw. abschneiden
cuisine	[kwi:'zi:n]	Küche
delicious	[di'liʃəs]	köstlich
distort sth.	[dɪ'stɔ:t]	etw. verzerren/verdrehen
dragon	['dræɡən]	Drache
encounter	[ɪn'kaʊntə]	Begegnung
fed: be ~ by sth.	[fed]	von einer Sache genährt werden
fine	[faɪn]	Geldstrafe
fortune-telling	['fɔ:tʃən ,telɪŋ]	Wahrsagerei
founder	['faʊndə]	Gründer(in)
habitat	['hæbɪtæt]	Lebensraum
hawker	['hɔ:kə]	Straßenhändler(in)
high tea	[,haɪ 'ti:] UK	frühes Abendessen mit warmen und kalten Gerichten und Tee
incense	['ɪnsens]	Weihrauch
investment trader	[ɪn ,vestmənt 'treɪdə]	Derivatehändler(in)
littering	['lɪtərɪŋ]	Abladen/Liegenlassen von Abfall
Merlion	['mɜ:liən]	
mouth	[maʊθ]	(Fluss)Mündung
peanut	['pi:nʌt]	Erdnuss
per capita	[pə 'kæpɪtə]	pro Kopf
queue	[kju:] UK	Warteschlange
restore sth.	[rɪ'stɔ:]	etw. restaurieren
riverside	['rɪvəsaɪd]	entlang des Flusses, am Fluss
satay	['sæteɪ]	Fleischspieß mit Erdnuss-Soße
share gossip	[,ʃeə 'ɡɒsɪp]	sich Neuigkeiten erzählen
silk	[sɪlk]	Seide
socialize	['səʊʃəlaɪz]	sich treffen, zusammenkommen
spice	[spɑɪs]	Gewürz
spouting	['spautɪŋ]	speiend
squat	[skwɒt]	hocken
stall	[stɔ:l]	Verkaufsstand
woodcarving	['wʊd ,kɑ:vɪŋ]	Holzschnitzerei
worshipper	['wɔ:ʃɪpə]	Gläubige(r), Gottesdienstbesucher(in)

own. It follows Chinese grammar and borrows words from Chinese, Malay and Indian languages. Singlish leaves out pronouns, clips words, distorts vowels and changes word stress. It's usually heard at markets or from taxi drivers.

One word you will often hear is "lah", which is used at the end of a sentence, like asking "OK?" Visitors are also likely to hear words like "looksee" for "take a look"; "Wah!", an expression of surprise; and "shioh", meaning "good, great or delicious".

That reminds me that I've been looking forward to lunch. One of Singapore's main attractions is the food, widely known for its variety, quality and reasonable price; and it is the main reason I often make a stop in Singapore. Enjoying food and dining out is a Singaporean passion fed by a huge range of cuisines. The city has everything, from McDonald's to various kinds of Asian food and high tea served in the best English tradition. Today, I am hunting for a Malaysian dish called satay.

Joining the crowds of hungry workers who have come down from the skyscrapers of central Singapore, I enter a hawker centre. At the satay stall, a woman squats on the floor, grilling sticks of meat over a charcoal burner. I have to join a queue, and the place is hot, noisy and a little chaotic, but the first mouthful is worth it all.

Later on, it's time to drink the island's most famous cocktail, the Singapore sling. The drink was invented in 1915 in the Long Bar of the Raffles Hotel, where it is still served today along with a bowl of peanuts. It's a tradition to throw the shells on the floor.



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