

Singapore

"Garden City" Awash With Large Park Lands



The Sultan Mosque

مسجد السلطان

Derick McGroarty looks at what Singapore has to offer beyond the short stop-over.

For many, Singapore is a stop-over for 2-3 days on route to Australia or elsewhere; but there is much more to see, enjoy and relax in the holiday resort. My impressions were of a "Garden City" awash with lush park lands, pristine cleanliness, inexpensive metered taxis, but mainly the sincere friendliness of the people.

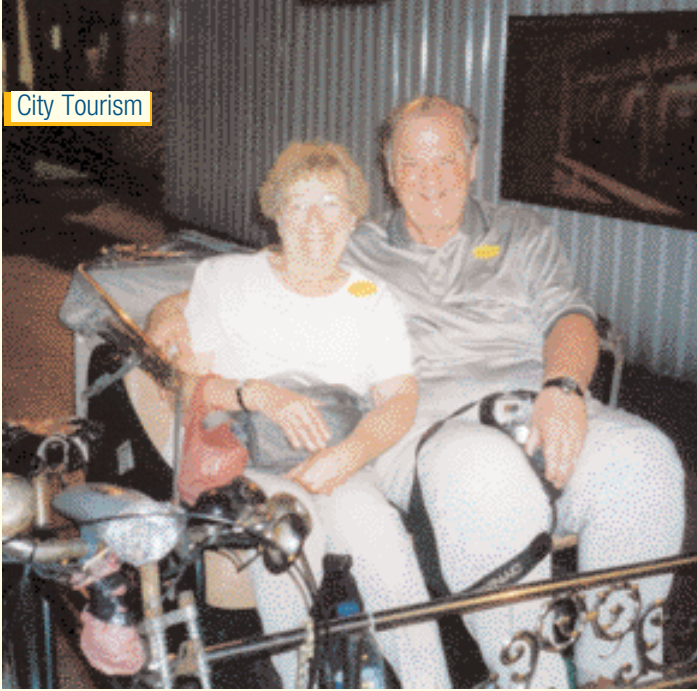
A cross roads of east and west with a deep harbour it was developed by a 19th century civil servant Sir Stamford Raffles. His widespread plans and those of his successors have culminated in the ultra modern high rise buildings of the now independent state, with trade and finance respected throughout the world.

Within the gleaming infrastructure there remains a true fabric of ethnic communities - a special multi-racial quality. There is China Town with its outdoor food stalls and colourful streets; Little India with the sights and sounds of a thriving community; Malaysian and Arab areas with devout Muslims and fine mosques. The Sultan Mosque, built in 1928, is one of the loveliest and most important places of Muslim worship in Singapore. There are hotels to suit all budgets. In the Orchard Road area I stayed for a few days at the 5-star Shangri-La Hotel- luxury with every possible facility including a garden area with fountains and an outdoor pool- a rarity in any city hotel. After sight seeing and/or shopping it is a welcome sanctuary to relax from the noise, heat and bustle in the streets. .

Orchard Road is lined with shopping malls full of designer label shops. Close by the Botanical Gardens is an extensive area and themed tropical gardens including one for orchids. At the top of the hill a special section of orchids named after visiting royalty, including Elizabeth II; Heads of State and VIPs.

For a longer stay, Shangri- La,Rasa Sentosa is Singapore's only beach front hotel. It is a landscaped world of its own on Sentosa Island. Very suitable for families with supervised children's clubs- a resort where you could enjoy a holiday without ever leaving the grounds. The General Manager Ben Bousnina believes in an informal atmosphere throughout so that ➤

City Tourism



The writer with his wife in the tri-shaw الكاتب مع زوجته في عربة نقل محلية



Victoria Theatre

مسرح فكتوريا



The Zoo

حديقة الحيوانات

guests feel relaxed at all times. For something special I recommend the Terrace restaurant. Seating under cool fans with an open aspect of the South China Sea, the a la carte menu includes flambé dishes. The hotels are linked by a regular shuttle service and are both highly recommended.

Award winning "Tour East" offer comprehensive half-day tours to all places of interest, with pick-up and English speaking guides. I enjoyed "Breakfast at the Zoo" with close photography of a 40 year old Orang-utan with her baby. There is also a popular "Night Zoo Excursion". "China Town by Night" a very full package includes dinner, a river trip by sampan with a magical view of the lights of Singapore and an exhilarating tri-shaw ride through narrow streets and broad highways. A "Harbour Cruise" includes a visit to Kusu Island. All operated to time and guides were informative and helpful.

Explore the Civic District on foot starting at the "Raffles Landing Site". The impressive white statue is now dwarfed by surrounding sky scrapers, but across the river well preserved "shop houses" part of his original plan, are a contrast between old and new.

Well preserved colonial buildings include: The Victoria Theatre, a focal point for performing arts and music; City Hall where Lord Louis Mountbatten accepted the surrender of the city by the Japanese in 1945 and Lee Kuan Yeu declared the island's independence in 1959; The Supreme Court -a massive row of columns and green dome and St. Andrews Cathedral with its gleaming white exterior. At the Waterfront the Merlion Statue, half fish half lion pouring a large water spout from its mouth has become a symbol and icon of Singapore. Another icon is Raffles Hotel, established in 1887. Savour the historic atmosphere with

afternoon tea in the lobby or a non- alcoholic "Singapore Sling". Next door is yet another of the many vast shopping malls

Night life buzzes around Clifford Pier with clubs, karaoke and street performers contributing to crowds of people enjoying themselves well into the night. There are concerts at City Hall by world orchestras.

Sentosa is a holiday island linked to the mainland by causeway and cable car. There are fine sandy beaches and luxuriant greenery. With much to see in close proximity, regular buses linking all attractions are free! The laser produced animals and mythical characters at the musical light and water show is also free-children will love it.

Underwater World includes a "tunnel under the water" with spectacular views of active large fish. The price includes a dolphin show. The 120 metre Sky Tower provides panoramic views of the island and mainland. Another such view is from the top of the huge Merlion statue reached by an 11 story lift. Singapore has a rain forest within its city boundaries. Given time I would like to have walked the suspension bridge 250 metres long, 25 metres high, at the MacRitchie reservoir, to view the canopy of the forest and to follow the boardwalk to see the protected wildlife. Maybe next time!

I found the Insight City Guide convenient to carry, full of useful practical information.

The Singapore Tourist Board can provide maps, leaflets and general information free of charge. ■

Contacts

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