



# Singapore

📍 65 / POP 5.5 MILLION / AREA 718 SQ KM

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## Best Places to Sleep

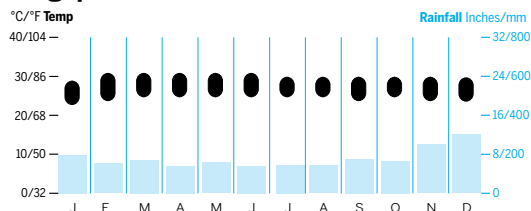
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## Why Go?

So much more than just a stopover city, Singapore is a destination in its own right – an ambitious, ever-evolving wonder of sci-fi architecture in billion-dollar gardens, of masterpieces in colonial palaces, and single-origin coffee in flouncy heritage shophouses. From cult-status Aussie chefs to fashion-forward local designers, some of the world's hottest creatives have set up shop on these steamy streets, turning the Little Red Dot into a booming hub for all things hip and innovative. Beyond the new and dynamic simmers the Singapore of old: a spicy broth of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Peranakan traditions, smoky temples, raucous wet markets, and sleepy islands reached by bumboat. Sure, it might be clean, rich and a stickler for rules, but dig a little deeper and you'll uncover a Singapore far more complex than you ever imagined.

## When to Go

### Singapore



**Feb** Singapore celebrates Chinese New Year with fireworks, dragon parades and buzzing night markets.

**May** Bag some grin-inducing bargains at the Great Singapore Sale, launched annually in late May.

**Sep** Accommodation is scarce and expensive, but speed demons shouldn't miss the Formula One.

## History

Chinese traders en route to India had plied the waters around what is now Singapore from at least the 5th century AD, though the records of Chinese sailors as early as the 3rd century refer to an island called Pu Luo Chung, a name reputedly derived from the Malay Pulau Ujong, meaning 'island at the end'.

Landing on its shores in 1819 was Sir Stamford Raffles. Then lieutenant general of Java, Raffles deemed the muddy island an ideal spot for a new British-controlled entrepôt to counter Dutch power in the region. Signing a treaty with the Sultan of Johor and *temenggong* (senior judge), Raffles acquired the use of Singapore in exchange for modest annual allowances to Sultan Hussein and the judge. This exchange ended with a cash buyout of the pair in 1824 and the transfer of Singapore's ownership to Britain's East India Company.

Large waves of immigration soon washed over the free port, driven by thrifty merchants keen to avoid the high tariffs at the competing, Dutch-controlled port of Melaka. Despite a massive fall in rubber prices in 1920, Singapore's prosperity continued, the population soared and millionaires were made almost overnight.

Crashing the party on 15 February 1942 was General Yamashita Tomoyuki and his thinly stretched army, who caught the British rulers by surprise and swiftly wrested control from them, renaming the island 'Syonan' (Light of the South) and interning or executing countless locals, Europeans and Allied POWs. Though the British regained power in 1945, the occupation had eroded Singapore's innate trust in the British empire's protective embrace. New political forces were at work and the road to independence was paved.

If one person can be considered responsible for the position Singapore finds itself in today, it is Lee Kuan Yew (1923–2015). This third-generation Straits-born Chinese was named Harry Lee, and brought up to be, in his own words, 'the equal of any Englishman'. His education at the elite Raffles Institution and Cambridge University equipped him well to deal with both colonial power and political opposition when Singapore took control of its own destiny in the 1960s.

The early years were not easy. Race riots in 1964 and ejection from the Malay Federation in 1965 made Lee's task even harder.

Lee used tax incentives and strict new labour laws to attract foreign investment. This, combined with huge resources poured into developing an English-language education system that produced a competent workforce, saw Singapore's economy rapidly industrialise, securing the road to today's affluent, role-model nation.

## Sights

Singapore's urban core is located on the south of the island. Here you'll find the Singapore River, flanked by Boat Quay, Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay. South of the river lie the CBD (Central Business District) and Chinatown, while immediately north of the river lies the Colonial (also referred to as the Civic) District. Further north is Little India and Kampong Glam, while east of Kampong Glam are Geylang, Katong (Joo Chiat), East Coast Park and Changi. Northwest of the Colonial District is Orchard Rd, while further west still lie the Singapore Botanic Gardens and the heavily expat district of Dempsey Hill. At the river's mouth is Marina Bay, while further southwest lies Sentosa Island. Central-north Singapore is where you'll find Singapore Zoo and Night Safari, as well as the island's major nature reserves.

## Colonial District, the Quays & Marina Bay

The Colonial District brims with iconic heritage architecture and must-see museums. Straddling the river are the eateries, bars and nightspots of Boat Quay, Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay. Further east, the river spills into attention-seeking Marina Bay, home to Marina Bay Sands and Gardens by the Bay.

### Gardens by the Bay GARDENS

(Map p494; ☎6420 6848; [www.gardensbythebay.com.sg](http://www.gardensbythebay.com.sg); 18 Marina Gardens Dr; gardens free, conservatories adult/child under 13yr S\$28/15; ☀5am–2am, conservatories & OCBC Skyway 9am–9pm, last ticket sale 8pm; 🚇 Bayfront) Singapore's 21st-century botanic garden is a S\$1 billion, 101-hectare fantasy-land of space-age biomes, high-tech Supertrees and whimsical sculptures. The Flower Dome replicates the dry, Mediterranean climates found across the world, while the even more astounding Cloud Forest is a tropical montane affair, complete with waterfall. Connecting two of the Supertrees is the OCBC Skyway, with knockout views of the gardens, city and South China Sea. At 7.45pm and 8.45pm, the